

T H E O L O G I A ;
O R,
DISCOURSES OF GOD.
DELIVERED IN CXX
S E R M O N S.
IN TWO VOLUMES.

CONTAINING,

VOL. I.
DISCOURSES
Of the Necessity and Excellency of the **KNOWLEDGE** of **GOD**; of his **BEING**—**INCOMPREHENSIBILITY**—**KNOWLEDGE**—**WISDOM**—**POWER**—**HOLINESS**—**GOODNESS**—**JUSTICE**—**PATIENCE**—**MERCY**—**TRUTH**—**ETERNITY** and **GLORY**.

VOL. II.
DISCOURSES
Of making the glorifying **GOD** our Chief End, and our great Employment and Business; of **GOD**'s Blessedness; of his Decrees; of the Unity of the Divine Essence; of the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead; of beholding the Glory of **GOD** in the Glass of the Gospel; and of propagating the Knowledge of **GOD**.

By **Mr. WILLIAM WISHEART, SEN^r.**
Principal of the University of **EDINBURGH**,
and one of the Ministers of that City.

VOL. I.

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To the Right Honourable

JOHN CAMPBELL, Esq;
Lord Provost;

WILLIAM NEILSON,	}	BAILIES;
THOMAS DUNDAS,		
JOHN WIGHTMAN,		
CHARLES TAILFER,		

ROBERT CRAIG, Dean of Guild,
JOHN FORREST, Treasurer,
JOHN LAUDER, Deacon-Conveener,

And the remanent Members of the Honourable Council
of EDINBURGH.

RIGHT HONOURABLE,

THE prefixing your names to the following Discourses, is what I could not avoid, without a manifest trespass upon that dutiful regard, which the honourable character you bear, and the support, countenance and respect, I have had from you, in the exercise of my ministry, may justly challenge.

All

All these Sermons being preached in this City, and most of them in the audience of some of your Honours, particularly of My Lord Provost, I hope it will be thought they may justly claim a title to your patronage.

The ready access you have allowed me upon all proper occasions, and the abundant civilities and unmerited favours I have received from you, both in your public and in your private capacities, move me to make this public acknowledgement of my great obligations to you.

Right Honourable, the benign influence of your administration in the City; your zeal for the glory of God; your concern for the Protestant Interest; your untainted loyalty and unshaken fidelity to THE BEST OF KINGS, and your firm adherence to the Protestant Succession in his Royal Family, in the most difficult and trying times; your wisdom in laying down prudent measures for the support of the Good Town under its heavy burdens, and fatherly care in the diligent prosecution of them; and, in fine, your laudable endeavours and generous designs for the advancement of religion and the interest of the gospel in the
City,

DEDICATION.

City, deserve to be gratefully remembered by posterity, and imitated by your successors.

One thing I find myself obliged more particularly to observe, to your honour, That though it was in a time of great danger that you were called to enter upon the government of the City, a wicked and unnatural rebellion then threatening the kingdom with blood and confusion, and the ruin of all our valuable interests; yet the greatest dangers we were in, when the enemy was even at our gates, frightened you not from your duty, but rather proved a spur to your diligence, and an occasion of your exerting yourselves with the greater vigour, in the defence of all that was dear unto us.

And now that it hath pleased our gracious God to crown your exemplary zeal and firmness, in so good a cause, with the desired success, and to free, not only this City, but the whole kingdom, from the great dangers we were in by that perfidious rebellion: May this amazing goodness encourage you still to go on in seeking the good of the city, and the advancement of religion in it, which your pious care and prudent conduct give us ground to expect: May the God of heaven continue to bless with success, and abundantly reward

ward all your noble and faithful endeavours this way;
and may the City, under your government, flourish in
true religion, and abound in all the blessings of peace
and plenty. These are the earnest prayers of,

RIGHT HONOURABLE,

Your most humble

and obedient Servant,

in the LORD,

May 22d,
1716.

WILL. WISHEART.

THE P R E F A C E.

IT is of no small concernment in religion, with respect both to our worship and to our obedience, what notions and conceptions we have of God. Right and acceptable worship and obedience are founded in right apprehensions of him. How can we glorify him without suitable conceptions of his glory and greatness? And how can we perform any right worship to him, if we have unworthy notions of him imprinted in our minds? Hence it is that the right knowledge of God is promised as the foundation of acceptable worship, in these words, *And the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation* *. What holy fear, or love, or humility, can there be in our worship, unless we have some becoming conceptions of the infinite power and justice of God, of the amiableness of his nature, and of his glorious and matchless excellency? Mens' misbehaviour in the worship of God, their coldness, formality, deadness, and carelessness in it, arise in a great measure from their misapprehensions of him. And however men may please themselves in their own mistaken notions and conceits, and entertain them in their minds, (as many even of the wiser Heathens did, and too many Christians do at this day) yet it is plain that all unworthy apprehensions and conceptions of God, as they are most dishonourable to him, and debase his nature, so they are manifestly idolatrous. When unworthy conceits of God are lodged and entertained in the minds of men, this is plainly to frame and erect images of him in their own fancies; and all worship guided by them, is a worship of that image set up in the mind, and not a worship of the true God. Yea, mens' unworthy conceptions of God have been one great cause of the grossest idolatry. The Heathens *becoming vain in their imaginations* of God, *changed his glory into an image made like to corruptible man* †. Having set up vain images of him in their fancy, they were thereby led to set up idolatrous representations of him in their temples. From all which it is evident, that right conceptions of God are absolutely necessary to our worship. They are also no less necessary to the whole of our obedience. Wrong notions of God were the spring of man's first apostacy and rebellion: and they are still the root of all disobedience; for unworthy notions of God in the mind breed contempt, which is the mother of disobedience. Pharaoh thought himself too good to stoop to such a God as he had fancied the God of Israel to be, *Who is the Lord*, says he, *that I should obey his voice* ‡? When men

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* Isa. xix. 21.

† Rom. i. 21, 23.

‡ Exod. v. 2.

shape God according to their own corrupt fancies, such false ideas and conceptions of him are the root and spring of all kinds of vice. Hence it is that God chargeth the impieties of men upon this score: *These things thou hast done, says he—Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself*^a. And I cannot but take notice, that wrong notions of God are that from which multitudes in this generation have encouraged themselves in their rooted enmity against all serious piety, in their contempt of and corrupting the true worship of God, and in these horrid impieties that as a deluge have overspread the nation; for all which the wrath of a holy and jealous God hath often gone out against us. Upon all these accounts, it is of the greatest concern to all those that would apply themselves in earnest to serious practical religion, to get right notions and conceptions of that God with whom they have to do: For right apprehensions of him are of great influence to excite men to the exercise of faith, repentance, love, fear, humility, and the performance of that sincere and universal obedience to him that he requires. The more worthy conceptions we have of God, the more we will fear and love him; and the more we fear and love him, the more readily and chearfully will we obey him. The blessed angels that behold his face, do most chearfully obey his commands†.

From what is said, it plainly appears how necessary it was that God should make some discovery of himself to us suited to our capacity: for without this we could have no right conceptions of him. Being but poor finite creatures, our capacity is so weak and shallow; that we are not able to conceive of an infinite God as he is in himself. In this respect, *clouds and darkness are round about him*‡; and he *dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto*||. Therefore he is pleased, in condescension to our weakness, to come, as it were, out of his inaccessible light, and to manifest himself to us by certain attributes, such as infinite power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, justice, &c. which are as so many rays of the divine perfections let down to us: and we have right conceptions of God, when we conceive of him according to these representations he hath made of himself to us.

We must acknowledge that God hath given some discoveries of himself, both by implanted notions of him in the minds of men, whereof the accusations and condemnations of conscience are to me a convincing evidence; and in his works of nature, many of his invisible perfections being clearly seen in the works of creation and providence§. But, though these discoveries are of excellent use, and the knowledge of God by these means necessary as a foundation for higher conceptions and apprehensions of him: Yet neither the works of nature, nor the implanted notions of
God

^a Psal. l. 23. † Mat. xviii. 10. Psal. ciii. 20. ‡ Psal. xcii. 7. || : Tim. i. 16. § Rom. i. 20.

The PREFACE.

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God, give such discoveries of him, as are sufficient to furnish fallen man with such conceptions of him, as are suitable to the excellency of his nature; and necessary to right worship. What notion can even improved nature afford us of the wonders of divine grace, the riches of his goodness, the greatness of his love, the tenderness of his mercy, and especially of his pardoning mercy? And it is plain that nothing in nature can give any discovery of God in Christ, and of a holy Trinity of Persons. And though mere nature gives some notices of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God; yet they are but dim, and not in that fulness and splendor as to discover the glory of them. Mere nature can afford at best but weak and languishing notions of God. Therefore the world is called by some *Ænigma Dei*: That is, a riddle whereby God is set forth to us. And indeed even the wiser Heathens did often err in the interpretation of it, so that they did not, by all their natural and acquired wisdom, *know God**, but framed and entertained strange and unworthy notions of him. They did not conceive of God as God, but were all infected with some wrong opinion of him or other. And hence it was that they could never carve out a right worship for him; but from their own vain imaginations contrived modes of worship unworthy of the majesty of God, and below the nature of a man: so that their various ways of worship were more provoking than pleasing.

It is therefore an eminent expression of the divine goodness, that he hath given us more clear, full, and certain discoveries of himself in his written word, and in the glorious work of our redemption by Christ, there revealed and declared to be accomplished. He set but his footsteps in the creatures, but hath unveiled his face in the holy scriptures. True it is, that even in his word, he is pleased to temper the declarations of himself to our weakness, because we are not able to conceive of him as he is in himself. Therefore he ushers himself into our minds, by such expressions of his nature and perfections, as are borrowed from the creatures, and suited to our capacity: For if God had spoken of himself to us as he is, or in terms suited to the greatness of his majesty, our understandings could as little reach the loftiness of such expressions, as we can behold the brightness of his glory. Yet in the holy scriptures we have as plain and rich discoveries of his nature and glorious perfections, as can be drawn in lines and letters. They are as a glass, wherein we may behold the reflections of God, and view more of his glorious greatness and inexpressible goodness and amiableness, than all rational discoveries can present to us. And the holy scriptures give such discoveries of God as are necessary to our recovery from our fallen state, and able to lead us, by a due compliance with God, to the eternal en-

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* 1 Cor. i. 11.

joyment of him ; and such discoveries as are sufficient to direct us with respect to right and acceptable worship and obedience. And whereas it is dangerous to entertain even such notions of God as are true, unless we are certain of the truth of them ; the discoveries we have of him in the holy scriptures are most certain ; they carry their own evidence along with them, being the words of Him who is Truth itself, and cannot lie to us.

Even the Jews, under the law, had such discoveries of God as were necessary and sufficient to guide believers in their faith and worship, and the performance of all that obedience which God required of them. In the moral law they had a discovery of him in his holiness, majesty and sovereignty ; and in the promises and prophecies concerning Christ, and the sacrifices and other types of him, they had discoveries of his infinite justice and holiness, of his free love and grace, and of his pardoning mercy. They had such a revelation of God made unto them, as was suitable to the infant state of that church. We know not perfectly what their condition was ; but it is certain that God gave them out light as they were able to bear it. Yet the discoveries they had were comparatively dim, and the means of light they enjoyed so obscure, that even the wisest among them did but darkly understand them, and that not without the assistance of some special revelations, by prophets sent of God in several ages for that purpose. They *could not then stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished* *. But now, under the gospel, God having spoken to us by his Son, and revealed himself from his own bosom, we have more full and clear discoveries of him ; so that the weakest believer now may behold more of the glorious nature and perfections of God than the most grown believer under the law. The light of the gospel whereby God is now revealed, is glorious. Therefore, according to some, the gospel is resembled by *a sea of glass* †, in regard of the transparency of it, through which we see God and his infinite perfections. Gospel light being come, *the glory of the Lord (i. e. the glory of all his attributes) is risen upon us* ‡. And it was certainly most fit and meet that gospel light should be very glorious, and that the more full and clear discoveries of God should be reserved for gospel times, for the peculiar glory and honour of Christ, the great Prophet of the church, who came out of the Father's bosom to reveal God unto us ||. The Jews themselves expected the discovery of the face of God by the Messiah ; and to that purpose they interpreted Dan. ii. 22. In Christ he is discovered in the sweetness and beauty of his nature. Hence Christ is called *The Sun of Righteousness* §, as diffusing light and health by his beams. In his person and doctrine we have far more clear revelations and discoveries of God, than in all the apparitions to the patriarchs,

* 2 Cor. iii. 13. † Rev. xv. 2. ‡ Isa. lx. 1. || John i. 18. § Mal. iv. 2.

patriarchs, all the institutions under the law, and all the revelations of him by the prophets. In his person God is rendered spiritually visible, so that whosoever *sees him sees the Father* *. He is *the image of the invisible God* †. *The glory of God* (i. e. his glorious perfections) is discovered *in the face of Christ* ‡; i. e. In his person as God-man. God who dwells in the light unto which no man can approach, hath exhibited and expressed the glorious perfections of his nature to us in the person of his Son, that we might be led thereby into right notions and apprehensions of him. All the perfections of God are centered in him, and shine in him as an exact image: For he is *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person* ||. In his death and sufferings, the profound wisdom of God, his immense goodness, glorious power, impartial justice, unspotted holiness, and infinite love and condescension, are manifested in such a manner, that a higher discovery of God in this life we are not capable of. In his doctrine also he made a brighter discovery of God than all the prophets that went before him had done. As he was notably fitted for this discovery, seeing he was *in the bosom of the Father* §, and consequently had an intimate knowledge of his nature and perfections; so it was one great end of his coming, and of the Father's sending him **. The full revelation of God was to be given out by him, as the great Prophet promised to the church ††. He was promised as *a light of the Gentiles* ‡‡. He had undertaken to declare the name of God unto his brethren |||. And he asserts that he had *manifested his name*, and would further *declare it* unto the sons of men §§. This he did, partly in his own person, both before his death, when he instructed his disciples, and preached the gospel to the Jews; and after his resurrection, when he conferred with his apostles *of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God* ¶. Partly also by his Spirit, which he poured out upon his apostles and disciples, to fit and enable them to preach the gospel unto the nations; and whereby he inspired some of them, that they might commit the truths of the gospel unto writing. It was this he promised to his disciples, when he said to them, *The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father* ¶¶. Christ did communicate the plain discoveries of God in his most illustrious perfections, by his Spirit to the apostles, and by them to the church.

From all which it is evident, that the revelation made of God in the gospel must far exceed that under the law, in fulness and clearness, being made by *the only begotten Son of God from the bosom of the Father*. The people of God of old were under a dark dispensation,

* John xiv. 9. † Col. i. 15. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6. || Heb. i. 3. § John i. 18.

** John xvii. 6, 8. †† Deut. xviii. 18. ‡‡ Isa. xlii. 6. ||| 1 sa. xxii. 22.

§§ John xvii. 5, 26. ¶ Acts i. 3. ¶¶ John xvi. 25.

penſation, the diſcoveries they had of God being wrapt up in clouds of dark prophecies, legal ſacrifices, and other dark inſtitutions, which were ſhadows of things to come: But now theſe prophecies are accompliſhed, the dim glaſs of legal ceremonies is broken, and Chriſt the body being come, theſe dark ſhadows of him are evaniſhed, ſo that now *we behold the glory of the Lord with open face* *, comparatively to what the Jews did under the law. Though their eyes were as ſharp and clear as ours, and the object as glorious then as now; yet their light was dim in comparison of ours. * Gofpel light is as the light of ſeven days, comparatively to what they enjoyed: for now the clouds are ſcattered, the ſhadows of the night are fled away, and the ſun is riſen upon us; ſo that the diſcovery we have of God by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt in the goſpel, is exceeding eminent and glorious. Hence the goſpel is ſaid to be grace and truth †, in oppoſition to the law; as if there had been no grace nor truth in that old diſpenſation, becauſe indeed there was none comparatively to the clearneſs of goſpel revelation. This is the fullſt and cleareſt we are capable of in this life.

The admirable goodneſs and condeſcenſion of God in giving ſuch clear and full diſcoveries of himſelf in his word and goſpel, ought to engage all that live under the goſpel, to make a diligent improvement of them, for informing their minds, and influencing their life and practice. That God ſhould reveal himſelf ſo clearly and fully, in and by his own Son, unto ſuch as had brought themſelves into woſul darkneſs by their own ſin and folly, what admirable grace and condeſcenſion is here! Eſpecially, conſidering that it is of the greateſt concernment to us, with reſpect to our eternal condition, to be brought by ſuch diſcoveries to have right conceptions of God; and that he was no way obliged to make any revelation of himſelf unto us. He might for ever have locked up the treaſures of his wiſdom and prudence in his own eternal breaſt, and have left all the ſons of men in that woſul darkneſs into which they had caſt themſelves, and kept them under the chains and power of it, unto eternal judgment. Such therefore by whom theſe high diſcoveries of God in the goſpel are neglected, as they will be left without excuſe, ſo they are chargeable with the higheſt ingratitude to God, and a horrible contempt of his admirable grace and goodneſs, which cannot but expoſe them to his heavy wrath and indignation for evermore. It is therefore our duty and intereſt to improve theſe diſcoveries with all diligence, for furniſhing our minds with ſuch notions and conceptions of God, as are in ſome meaſure worthy of him, and ſuitable to the revelation he hath made of himſelf. But bare notions of God in the mind being but vain ſpeculations, therefore it
doth

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

† John i. 17.

doth also highly concern us to improve the revelation God hath made of himself for bettering our notions and apprehensions of him, that they may not only fill the head, but also affect the heart, and make the life fruitful. This is that knowledge of God that gives the mind its perfection, and the soul its blessedness*, and dispels our natural darkness, the removal whereof is the dawning of glory and immortality. Therefore let us not please ourselves with any notions and conceptions of God, how much soever they may be raised and refined, but such as transform the soul into his image, and influence our life and practice, with respect to his worship, and the whole of our obedience to him. The end of all gospel revelation is, to declare so much of God as is sufficient to be a bottom of our faith, love, and obedience, such as we are capable to perform in this imperfect state. He will make a far more high and bright discovery of himself, when he calls us to eternal contemplation, admiration, and praise.

It must be acknowledged, that after the greatest diligence in improving the discoveries we have of God, it is but very little of the knowledge of him that we can attain to in this life, even under the glorious light of the gospel. Though *we behold the glory of the Lord with open face* †; yet it is but *as in a glass*; and that not clearly, but *darkly* ‡. It were likely that under the shadows of the law, and in the morning of the gospel, when the day began to dawn, and the shadows were not fully scattered, that then there should be more obscurity. Yea, but even when gospel light hath shined brighter and brighter toward the perfect day, even then *we see but darkly*, and have but a dim knowledge of God. Yea, even Christians of the highest attainments in grace and knowledge, and of the nearest intimacy and familiarity with God, do in this life know but very little of him. Who so clear-sighted as the apostle Paul was? Yet even he had but a dark and obscure knowledge of God: For he says of himself and other believers, *we see but darkly*; and tells us that he *knew but in part*; and in the preceding verse, he compares all the knowledge he had of God to that he had of things when he was *a child*. His knowledge of God was very weak. O, how little a portion is known of him! All that we can know of him in this life is but little comparatively to what he is in himself. We cannot conceive of him as he is. We cannot see into his infinitely glorious essence. *No man hath seen God at any time* ||. The very angels *cover their faces* § before him. His light is such as no creature *can approach unto* ¶. Our highest conceptions of him are very low: none of them reach the perfection of his glory. Though God himself hath taught us that he is infinite, omnipotent, and eternal, and though we have some words

* John xvii. 3. † 2 Cor. iii. 18. ‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12. || John i. 18.
§ Isa. vi. 2. ¶ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

words and notions about these things ; yet what do we know of the things themselves ? What disputes and different notions are there about them ? Is not our understanding brutish in the contemplation of them ? They are but the back-parts of infiniteness and eternity that we have a glimpse of. And as for the holy Trinity, the subsistence of three distinct persons in the same individual essence, it is wholly mysterious. *God's name is secret* *. *He makes darkness his pavilion and secret place* †. The infinite distance between him and us bars our access to him, and keeps us in the dark, that we cannot see him as he is in himself. O how immense is he in his nature ! We are not able to bear the rays of his glorious being. Our highest notions of him are but childish, in respect of his infinite perfections. To believe, admire, and praise, is all that we can attain unto. Yea, it is but little that the best know of God, in comparison of what they shall know in the life to come. They shall then have clearer notions and fuller conceptions of him. Any sight we have of him in this life is but cloudy and enigmatical ‡. We see but the back-parts of his glory §. We have but now and then some glimpses of it. God gives us but imperfect discoveries of himself in this life. Any discovery we have of him is, as it were, wrapt up in a cloud. *He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it* §. And such is our weakness and incapacity, that we are not able to bear the full discoveries of his glory. *No man can see his face and live* ¶. The church's eyes, though they are clear like doves, yet they are *within her locks* ††. There are still some obstructions to a full sight. But in heaven the scales shall for ever fall off from the eye of the soul, and the dark vail from the heart, that it may behold without weakness and winking ; and the light will dart immediately upon the soul, without a reflection from a glass ; so that we shall *see God face to face, and know even as also we are known* ††. We may apprehend that we have attained clear and high notions of God now : but when he shall bring us into his immediate presence, we shall be ready to cry out, that the thousandth part of his glory, perfection, and blessedness, never entered into our hearts.

But though, after all our search and study, and our best improvement of the rich discoveries of God that we have in the gospel, we can know but very little of him : yet so much may be known of him, as is necessary to be a foundation for right and acceptable worship and obedience. We may know him so as to love, desire, and delight in him ; and so as to fear, serve, and obey him ; and so far as to admire, adore, and praise his incomprehensible majesty : And we may know enough to take down the pride of

* Judges xiii. 18. † Psal. xviii. 11. ‡ 1 Cor. xii. 12. § Exod. xxxiii. 23.
§ Job xxvi. 9. ¶ Exod. xxxiii. 20, 23. †† Cant. iv. 1. †† 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

of our hearts, and to keep us low and humble under the sense of our ignorance of him. Therefore our darkness and weakness can be no plea for our sloth and negligence. On the contrary, the consideration of this, that it is but little of the knowledge of God we can attain unto in this imperfect state, should sharpen our endeavours, and add spurs to our diligence, in *following on to know the Lord**. And most certain it is, that such as find sweetness and benefit by these discoveries God hath made of himself in and by Christ, will be continually reaching after a further acquaintance with them. It is therefore of the greatest concernment to us, to be diligent in studying the word of God, and searching into the mind of God in it; and to form all our conceptions of him according to the revelation he hath made of himself therein. All notions and conceptions of God, fetched from his word, have his seal and stamp upon them, and none else. That we may profit in the knowledge of God by the word, we ought to mix the word with faith, without which all our conceptions of him are but loose and uncertain notions. It concerns us also to consider what we read, and to pause a little on the descriptions we find of God, not resting till we find our hearts stirring, and rising up in an holy adoration and admiration of him. It is likewise most necessary that we look up to Christ, and depend on him; for it is he that must reveal God unto us†. We ought to be frequent and fervent in prayer for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who alone can *search the deep things of God*‡, and reveal them unto us. And it is also our duty to use the proper helps and assistances afforded to us by other good books that treat of God, his nature and perfections: For there are many things God hath revealed of himself, that people cannot well *understand, except some man guide them*||. True it is that we have not alike ability to buy books, nor alike time and leisure for reading them: But it is no less true, that many pretend want of time and money for such purposes, who yet find enough of both for other things that are unnecessary, yea, impertinent and sinful. How much money is spent, by many, upon their unnecessary and unlawful sports and pastimes, superfluous household furniture, vain and gaudy attire, costly and delicate meats and drinks, yea, in drinking to excess, and following their sinful and brutish pleasures? And how much precious time is consumed in unnecessary visits, unprofitable and sinful discourse, tipling in taverns and ale-houses, immoderate and unlawful recreations, reading play-books and romances, excessive sleep, and curious decking and trimming the body? If the money and time that is spent about these things, were employed in buying and reading the holy scriptures, and other good books that explain, confirm, and apply the doctrines there revealed, what a happy ac-
count

* Hos. vi. 3. † Mat. xi. 27. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 10. || Acts viii. 31.

count would this come to? Even the duties of mens' lawful callings and employments in the world should not divert them from studying the knowledge of God in Christ. It is the sin of many that they grasp so much worldly business, that they leave themselves no time for reading the scriptures, and using some proper helps for understanding what they read.

Great help hath been afforded to Christians in this matter by divers learned and godly divines, and, by some of them, in our own language, whose works praise them in the gates; for which we have great cause to be very thankful unto God. The same is also aimed at in these Discourses. They are an help offered to Christians by a weak hand, in order to their due improvement of these glorious discoveries God hath made of himself in the gospel of his Son: So that the subject speaks for itself, being sublime, noble, excellent, and necessary. The rich discoveries God hath made to us in the holy scriptures, of his nature, essential perfections, and personal relations, are here insisted upon: and Christians are quickened and directed to the due improvement of them.

As for the way and manner of handling this subject, as it is infinitely below what becomes the incomprehensible majesty of God; so the excellency of the subject may justly make me ashamed of the meanness of this performance, which yet is according to the measure of the gift that God hath given me to profit withal. In handling this subject I pretend to nothing singular or eminent; far less am I so presumptuous as to pretend to outstrip any of these worthy and eminent divines that have written on this subject. All that I pretend to, is to imitate them in doing good in the church of God, though I cannot come up to the pattern they have set me. I freely acknowledge that I have used their help and assistance, and particularly the help afforded to me, in reference to some of my discourses, by the works of the reverend and learned Mr. Charnock: But with what judgment and discretion I have used it, is submitted to judicious and candid readers. My stile and method is plain and ordinary, having always in my sermons studied to be as plain as I could to ordinary capacities. I think it will be easily discerned by judicious readers, that there is nothing in these Discourses designed to satisfy the vain curiosity of any. In delivering them to the people of my charge, I hope it was, through grace, my sincere aim to glorify God, and to promote truth and holiness among my hearers; and the same is now, if my heart deceive me not, my sincere aim in publishing them. I am very sensible that many defects will be found in them; and perhaps there are also some mistakes, which I hope God for Christ's sake will pardon, and I expect that candid

did readers will also forgive them †. But I am hopeful that nothing shall be found in them contrary to the doctrine delivered in the holy scriptures; or to the form of sound words, received in this church; and wherein the members of it have been educated and instructed: I hope there are many things in them that may edify serious Christians, and nothing that may justly offend any of them.

I shall, for the further satisfaction of such as are willing to receive it, give this plain and ingenuous account; how I have been led, by the hand of divine Providence, to the publishing of these Discourses. When I was prosecuting a purpose I had of preaching upon the principles of religion to the people of my congregation, I was very near gone through all the divine attributes, before I had the least thought of making any of these Discourses more public: But some of the most judicious among my hearers did, on several occasions, express their desire and wish that my sermons might be printed. Yet their desires had not that weight with me, till I had occasion of communicating divers of these Discourses to some other persons, to whose judgment I pay a great regard, who, after their perusal of them, advised me to go on in this subject, and particularly to preach on the doctrine of the holy Trinity: And having afterward communicated the whole to them, they expressed their earnest desire that the same might be published, as that which might be of good use unto the people of God. Besides this, there were divers other things that had weight with me: For I considered that what divers eminent divines had published on this subject, was generally in larger volumes; which many, into whose hands this book may come, had neither money to buy, nor time to read: That diversity of gifts, though they be not alike eminent and useful, and variety in handling the same truths, contribute much to the edification of the church: That one book comes into the hands of some, and another into the hands of others, whereby truth and piety are promoted: That God hath sometimes blessed weak and mean endeavours, such as I acknowledge this to be: And that God might be pleased to bless my sincere though weak essay this way, to provoke others of greater abilities, to employ the talent God hath given them by writing, for the good and edification of the church: For it may be the fault of some able and worthy men, especially in this church, that they do so much spare their labour this way. These considerations did contribute not a little to clear my call to adventure upon the publishing of these Discourses. And having had God's call cleared to me, I depend on him, through Christ, for his rich blessing, which alone can make them effectual for the edi-

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† *Domine Deus, quaecunq; dixi in his libris de tuo, agnoscant & tui; et quæ de meo, & tu ignosce & tui.* August.

fication of his people ; and am hopeful that the publishing of this Book shall not be without some good fruit, to the praise of his glorious grace. And so I conclude with my earnest and hearty prayer to God, that my failings may be pardoned, and my weak endeavours accepted, through the mediation of Jesus Christ ; and that a rich blessing may attend the reading of these Discourses, to make them effectual for promoting truth and holiness, that God in all things may be glorified ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

THEOLOGIA,

THEOLOGIA;
OR,
DISCOURSES OF GOD.

DISCOURSE I.

Of the Necessity and Excellency of the Knowledge
of God.

SERMON I.

Jer. xxiv. 7. *And I will give them an heart to know me, that
I am the Lord.*

IT is matter of sad regret, that in a land of light, and under plenty of the means of knowledge, there should be so much woful ignorance of God. Alas, many are grossly ignorant; ignorant of what is most necessary to be known concerning God: and many members of the church, who, in respect of the means they have enjoyed, might have been teachers of others, *have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God* (a). Yea, serious Christians know but little of God; little, in comparison of what they ought to know; little, in comparison of what they might have known; and little, in comparison of what others have attained unto, who had not such means and helps to the knowledge of God as they have. Therefore I am, from this text, to discourse to you, of the necessity and excellency of the knowledge of God, that hereby you may be quickened to the serious study thereof.

In this chapter, under the type of *good and bad figs*, the Lord in a vision reveals to the prophet, that he would deal more graciously with these Jews, that were carried captive to Babylon with Jeconiah, than with those that either remained in their own land, or had fled down to Egypt. Particularly, from verse 5th and downward, the Lord shews, that as the
good

(a) Heb. v. 12.

good figs were approved by Jeremiah, and pleasing to him, so he did approve of them that were carried captive, and humbled for their sins; and that he would own and look after them, and favour them with many great blessings, amongst which this in my text is one, *an heart to know the Lord.*

In this gracious promise, we may notice, 1. The blessing promised. 2. The author of this blessing. 3. The persons to whom the promise is made.

1. The blessing promised, *An heart to know God that he is JEHOVAH*; where we have,

(1.) The act, *Know*. There is a two-fold knowledge of things. 1. A speculative knowledge; when we have some barren notions of things in our head or brain; some dry and sapless speculations of them, without any further benefit. 2. An affective or practical knowledge; such a knowledge as affects the heart, and influenceth the life and practice. This is what is here promised, called *an heart to know God*. The former is a head knowledge; this is a heart knowledge.

(2.) The object, *God, that he is the Lord*. God is the supreme object of knowledge, and such as infinitely transcends the reach and capacity of all created understandings; so that he can be perfectly known only by himself. Yet there is a knowledge of God unto salvation attainable, which is here promised. God is not here to be considered absolutely, but in relation to some special revelation of himself. There is a knowledge of God as God, by the light of nature; but this is not here intended; nor can it be the subject of any gracious promise, seeing it is common to all men; but God is to be considered here, as revealed in Christ: So that the knowledge here promised, is a knowledge of God in Christ, of God in covenant, of God as he hath revealed himself and his mind and will in the holy scriptures. Then it is added, *That I am the Lord (JEHOVAH)*. This name denotes the self-existence of God. To know him as he is JEHOVAH, is to know him as the eternal, unchangeable, and independent Being, that hath his being in and of himself, and is the fountain and cause of all other beings, and gives a being to his decrees, purposes, and promises.

(3.) The subject, the *Heart*. There is promised, not only *an head*, but *an heart* to know God. The heart is here to be taken as comprehending the understanding, the will, and the affections: So that here the Lord promiseth, not only

only that their understandings should be enlightened, but that their wills should be changed and renewed by grace. Such a knowledge of God is here promised as affects the heart, and fills it with love to him, desires after him, and delight in him, and a reverence of his authority, and so shews itself in obedience to him. Such a knowledge of God is intended, whereby the mind is renewed, being accompanied with faith and love in the heart: A knowing God by a law in the heart, as well as by a notion in the head. Therefore the law written in the heart is rendered as a reason why his people shall know him (b).

2. The author of this blessing, God himself. *I will give them*, says he.—Importing that men are naturally destitute of the right knowledge of God; and that none can give the right knowledge of him, or an heart to know him, but he himself: therefore he here undertakes to bestow this blessing.

3. The persons to whom the promise is made. *I will give them*, i. e. To God's covenanted people among the Jews, and consequently to all whom he takes into covenant with him. Therefore it follows, *And I will be their God*. So that this blessing is promised to all God's elect, to whom he becomes a God in and by covenant.

The doctrine I propose from these words thus explained, is this,

The right knowledge of God is a great blessing, whereof God alone is the Author, and which he gives to all whom he brings into covenant with him.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall show,

1. *What this knowledge of God is.*
2. *That it is a great and excellent blessing.*
3. *That God alone is the Author of it.*
4. *That he gives this blessing to all whom he takes into covenant with him.*
5. *I shall apply the doctrine.*

First, What is this knowledge of God which he gives to all whom he takes into covenant with him?

1. It is not an immediate knowledge, such as that knowledge we have of a man by seeing him and conversing with him

(b) Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.

him face to face. Therefore it is said, that God dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see (c). Any knowledge of God that we attain to in this life, is like the knowledge of a man in a glass: For now we see through a glass, darkly (d). Such glasses are the works of creation and providence: but more especially the word of God is as a clear glass, wherein his glory shines forth to us. In this life we see and know God only by certain ways and means. We have no immediate sight of God. The sight of immediate vision is reserved till the life to come, when the saints shall see God face to face (e).

2. It is not a comprehensive knowledge, as if we could comprehend the nature and perfections of God. He is incomprehensible by any created understanding. *Canst thou by searching find out God? says Zophar, canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection (f)?* Though Moses was admitted to great familiarity with God, yet the furthest he could attain to was a sight of his back-parts (g), and a beholding the similitude of the Lord (h). Even the angels and glorified saints have no comprehensive knowledge of God. A bucket cannot contain the ocean: Far less can we, poor finite creatures, comprehend an infinite God in our understanding.

3. It is not a perfect knowledge, so far as is possible for a creature to know him. *Here we know but in part (i). O how little a portion is heard of him (k)!* All the knowledge of God that the best have here, is but little in comparison of what they shall have hereafter. Hence it is that the most eminent saints confess and bewail their ignorance of God. As the psalmist, *So foolish was I, and ignorant (l).* And wise Agur, *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy (m).* Much of our natural darkness still remaineth; and God doth not so fully manifest himself here, as he will do hereafter.

4. It is not a knowledge of God only in his nature and attributes, but a knowledge of God in three Persons, of God in Christ. Many even of the Heathens knew much of God; and some of them have discoursed excellently of his nature and attributes. They knew that God is, and what he is, that

(c) 1 Tim. vi. 16. (d) 1 Cor. xiii. 12. (e) 1 Cor. xiii. 12, (f) Job xi. 7. (g) Exod. xxxiii. 23. (h) Numb. xii. 8. (i) 1 Cor. xiii. 12. (k) Job xxvi. 14. (l) Psal. lxxiii. 22. (m) Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

that he is infinite, eternal, omnipotent, &c. but they knew not who he is. Excellent to this purpose is that text, *This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (n)*. That God, who is one in three persons, is the only true God. This knowledge of God is so necessary, that without it all other knowledge of him is insufficient to salvation. All notions of God out of Christ are below him, and many times unworthy of him. We do but guess at the nature of God, till we see him *in the face of Christ (o)*. All notions of God out of Christ are but faint and weak, and lose much of their majesty and beauty, of their power and efficacy upon the souls of men: Yea, all notions of God without a Mediator, are terrible to guilty sinners.

5. It is not a speculative knowledge only, but a practical and saving knowledge; as I cleared already, when I explained the text. It is not only *an head*, but *an heart to know God*. Men may have some notions of God in Christ in their heads, that never sink into their hearts. Even the devils have much of this knowledge. And this is all the knowledge of God that the generality of professors have. It is like the knowledge of meat in the brain of a hungry man, who hath nothing to put in his mouth. But the knowledge of God here promised, is a practical knowledge, an heart-knowledge, that sinks down into the heart and affections, and drives away all cold affections toward God, and makes us love, desire, and delight in him. It is such a knowledge of God as enlivens and quickens the heart; when not only some notions of God are pictured in the brain, but the image of God is stamped on the heart.

Second, Let me speak a little of the greatness and excellency of this blessing. The practical knowledge of God, *an heart to know him*, is indeed a glorious blessing. For,

1. Knowledge in general is excellent; much more the saving knowledge of God. Knowledge is man's excellency: It is his privilege and pre-eminence above the beasts. Many of the brute creatures excel us, either in beauty and colour, in strength and nimbleness of body, or in acuteness of sense: But man excels them in knowledge. *God teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven (p)* Knowledge is the perfection of our nature.

The

(n) John xvii. 3. (o) 2 Cor iv. 6. (p) Job xxxv. 11.

The more knowledge there is in us, there is the more of a man in us.

2. The saving knowledge of God is a principal part of his image in man. Our first parents were made after the image of God in knowledge, as well as in righteousness and holiness. And when this image is again repaired and restored in the elect, saving knowledge is a principal part of it. *The new man is said to be renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him (q).* An understanding savingly enlightened, ushers in a rectitude in all the other powers and faculties of the soul.

3. The saving and practical knowledge of God is a distinguishing mercy. It is a special gift of God only to a few whom he dearly loveth. Hence our blessed Lord tells his disciples, *It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given (r).* God hath denied it to many great, rich, noble, and learned men: *He hath hid it from the wise and prudent (s).* He hath given riches and wealth, vast treasures, and large possessions in the world, to many to whom he hath denied the saving knowledge of himself.

4. The right knowledge of God must needs be a great blessing, because the devil is a great enemy to it. When saving knowledge breaks into the soul, and the day-star arises in the heart, Satan falls from heaven like lightening. Therefore he sets himself to shut the door of knowledge. His business is to keep the souls of men in ignorance, by *blinding their minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them (t).* That must needs be excellent which the devil with so much vigour opposeth.

5. The saving knowledge of God is promised in the covenant of grace as a special gospel blessing: As here in my text, and that of the prophet, *They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord (u).* And again, *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (u).* And when the conversion of Egypt is foretold, the saving knowledge of God is promised as the foundation of all religion. *The Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation (x).*

But

(q) Col. iii. 10. (r) Mat. xiii. 11. (s) Mat. xi. 25. (t) 2 Cor. iv. 4. (u) Jer. xxxi. 34. (u) Isa. xi. 9. (x) Isa. xix. 21.

But wherein doth the greatness and excellency of this blessing appear? This appears from these considerations.

1. Consider the object of this knowledge. The knowledge of things excellent is very desirable: But what so excellent as God! The Psalmist cries out, *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth (y)!* His name alone is excellent (z). There is none in heaven or earth that may once be compared unto him. *Among the gods there is none like him (a).* And there is nothing in God but what is desirable and delectable. The most excellent beings fall infinitely short of him. He is all light without any darkness; all beauty without any deformity. Men reckon it a great attainment to have much knowledge of things natural: But here is an object infinitely more glorious than the whole scheme of nature; therefore the knowledge of him must be infinitely more excellent.

2. Consider the way and manner of attaining this knowledge: It is wholly supernatural. Much speculative knowledge of God may be attained by the works of creation, and much more by external revelation; but practical knowledge is had only by a gracious internal illumination. So the apostle tells us, *God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (b).* This points out the excellency of this knowledge. Knowledge is the more esteemed when there is something singular in the way of attaining it: Now, this is a knowledge brought down to us from the bosom of God by his own eternal Son: For, *No man hath seen God at any time: The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (c).* This is a light that springeth from the Father of lights, a fruit of divine teaching. Of this our blessed Saviour acquaints us, *It is written in the prophets, says he, and they shall be all taught of God: Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (d).* Other knowledge may be learned from man; but this is learned only from God. It is attained by God's opening the understanding, and by an internal gracious revelation to the soul (e).

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3. Consider

(y) Psal. viii. 1. (z) Psal. cxlviii. 13. (a) Psal. lxxxix. 6. and lxxxvi. 8. (b) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (c) John i. 18. (d) John vi. 45. (e) Luke xxiv. 45. Mat. xi. 25. and xvi. 17.

3. Consider the saving knowledge of God in itself; it is a great and excellent blessing, as appears from these properties and excellencies of it.

(1). It is the most necessary knowledge. A man may be happy without other knowledge; but no happiness without this. Such as die ignorant of God are eternally damned. *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,—taking vengeance on them that know not God (f).* There can be no true religion without it. The understanding, being the leading faculty of the soul, must first be enlightened. Hence the new man is said to be *renewed in knowledge (g)*. The whole body is dark, if the eye be so: And what the eye is to the body, that is the understanding to the soul (h). The whole body of a man's acts are acts of darkness, if the mind be blind. Without the knowledge of God, we can neither believe in him, nor love him, nor worship him, nor delight in him. All our worship, without this, may have that inscription engraven upon it, *To the unknown God (i)*.

(2.) It is the most profitable knowledge. It is the root and life of all religion. 1. It is the root of all true religion. The saving knowledge of God is the root of our happiness. Hence our blessed Lord says, in his prayer to the Father, *This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent (k)*. It is the root of eternal life; a root that will spring up to the knowledge of God above, which is compleat happiness. When this knowledge is planted in the heart, there is a work of grace begun, which will be carried on unto perfection. When we know God savingly, then we will love him, and long for him. Hence our Saviour says to the woman of Samaria, *If thou knewest the gift of God,—thou wouldest have asked of him (l)*. *They that know his name, will put their trust in him (m)*. 2. It is the life of all religion. As it conveys life to the soul at first, and is therefore called *the light of life (n)*; so it cherishes and promotes the spiritual life. It furthers the increase and exercise of all the graces of the Spirit in a gracious soul. Growth in grace is promoted by it. Hence the apostle exhorts us to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (o)*. It is fuel to our love, to make it flame the more vehemently. Therefore the apostle prays for the Philippians

(f) 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. (g) Col. iii. 10. (h) Mat. vi. 21.
(i) Acts xvii. 23. (k) John xvii. 3. (l) John iv. 10. (m) Phil.
ix. 10. (n) John viii. 12. (o) 2 Pet. iii. 18.

lippians, that their love might yet abound more and more in knowledge (p). Fruitfulness in every good work depends upon it. Hence they are joined together: *Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (q).* And the strength of grace is promoted by it: *For a man of knowledge increaseth strength (r).* Practical knowledge enlivens and quickens the soul. It engages believers in the pursuit of more conformity and likeness to God: *We all, says the apostle, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image (s).* Knowledge first begets love, and then love studies to draw the picture of the party beloved. This knowledge promotes humility: For the same light that discovers to the soul the glory and beauty of God, doth also discover to it its own vileness and filthiness. Again, it weans the heart from the world and all things here below. A sight of God's glory and beauty makes all the fancied glory and beauty of other things to disappear in the eye of the soul.

S E R M O N II.

(3) **I**T is the most pleasant knowledge. *Light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun (a).* But how much more pleasant is it to have the light of the gospel shining into the heart? How pleasant is it, when the clouds vanish, and the day-star arises in the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ! All knowledge is pleasant to the soul; The delights of learning do by far surpass the delights of carnal sense. O then, what delight and pleasure must there be in the knowledge of God, who is an infinitely excellent and pleasant object! The understanding is the highest faculty, and God is the highest object: O what sweetness and satisfaction must there be, when these two meet together! Hence the psalmist says, *My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord (b).*

(4.) It is the only satisfying knowledge. Other objects are not proportioned to the vast capacity of the soul of man; therefore the knowledge of them cannot satisfy. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (c).* But seeing God is an infinite object, and infinitely amiable; therefore

(p) Phil. i. 9. (q) Col. i. 10. (r) Prov. xxiv. 5. (s) 2 Cor. iii. 18. (a) Eccl. xi. 7. (b) Psal. civ. 34. (c) Eccl. i. 8.

therefore in the knowledge of him your soul may have full draughts, to satisfy your natural thirst after knowledge. *Shew us the Father*, says Philip, *and it sufficeth us* (d). The right sight and knowledge of God yields full satisfaction and refreshment. The soul seems to be boundless in its desires after knowledge; therefore if there be any satisfaction to it, it must be an infinite object. Nothing but an infinite God can give a full reply to all its cravings.

(5.) It is the most alluring knowledge. It sharpens the appetite for more. It is the nature of all true knowledge that it allures the mind to a further progress. *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning: And the heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge* (e). Much more is saving and spiritual knowledge of an engaging nature. Such as know any thing of God savingly, will be desirous to know more of him. See and compare two petitions of Moses. One is, *What is thy name?* The other is, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory* (f). When God first appeared to him, his petition is, *tell me thy name*: But when he was better acquainted with God, his request is, *shew me thy glory*. The more any man is acquainted with God, he will be the more desirous of spiritual discoveries of his glory. The more a man knoweth God, he will be still the more desirous to know him better. A taste here, provokes the appetite. Hence the apostle exhorts, *As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word,—if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious* (g).

(6.) It is the most sublime and mysterious knowledge. We use to call that a mystery which is a great secret, and the knowledge whereof lies out of the road of vulgar understandings. Now, the knowledge of God in Christ is eminently such. The doctrines of the holy Trinity, of the generation of the Son, of the procession of the Holy Ghost, of the incarnation, death, and sufferings of the Lord Jesus: These are great mysteries, sacred secrets, transcending the reach of all human understandings. They are mysteries even to believers themselves, especially in this state of imperfection. They dazzle the most piercing apprehension. He that knows God savingly, hath the knowledge of many sacred secrets, of great and wonderful mysteries, that the very angels desire to look into; such mysteries as tend to salvation,

(d) John xiv. 8. (e) Prov. i. 5. and xv. 14. (f) Exod. iii. 13. and xxxiii. 18. (g) 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.

salvation, and such as God hath whispered into the ears of very few.

(7.) It is the most certain knowledge. There is an uncertainty and doubtfulness in all other knowledge; but the foundation here is unshaken. That there is a God infinitely perfect, and a glorious Redeemer; the knowledge of these by the word is most certain. This knowledge is more divine than any demonstration can be; because it is not built upon human reason, but upon divine and infallible revelation. Hence we read of *the full assurance of understanding* (h). And the saving knowledge of God is called a *beholding the glory of God with open face* (i). That knowledge of God which natural men have, is rather an opinion of God than a knowledge: But when God shines into the heart, and the day-star arises there; this gives a most sure and certain knowledge. Hence our Lord says, in his prayer to the Father, *They have known surely that I came out from thee* (k). There can be nothing more sure than a divine light to an opened understanding.

(8.) It is the only true knowledge. Other knowledge is but a shadow; this is the substantial knowledge. Hence it is called *sound wisdom* (l). Other sciences are but shadows of wisdom; this is the sound wisdom. Whatever other learning and knowledge men have, yet if they have no saving knowledge, they are but fools in God's account. Without the saving knowledge of God, all other knowledge of him is but a form of knowledge, like the picture of a man without life. Therefore the most learned and wise philosophers among the heathens, who discoursed excellently of the nature and attributes of God, are reckoned among them that *know not God* (m). So that saving knowledge is the only true knowledge: Other knowledge, without this, doth not so much as deserve the name.

Third, I come to shew that God alone is the author of the saving and practical knowledge of himself. He alone can give you *an heart to know him*. I shall endeavour to clear this, 1. Negatively. 2. Positively.

1. Negatively. We can have this knowledge no where else.

(1.) The saving and practical knowledge of God is not attainable by the mere light of nature, without scripture-revelation;

(h) Col. ii. 2. (i) 2 Cor. iii. 18. (k) John xvii. 8. (l) Prov. xi. 7. and iii. 21. (m) 2 Thess. i. 18.

revelation; and that for two reasons. 1. Because there are some things necessary to be known concerning God, that nature could never discover to men: As, the doctrines of the blessed Trinity, of the incarnation of Christ, and of the redemption of lost elect sinners through him. 2. There are other things necessary to be known concerning God, that could not be so clearly known without scripture-revelation; as, the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, the riches of his grace, the bowels of his mercy, the purity of his holiness, and the dreadfulnes of his justice. There are but dark discoveries of these in the book of nature; but they are clearly revealed in the book of the holy scriptures.

(2.) The saving and practical knowledge of God is not attainable by reason, or by our industry, even though we have the help of scripture-revelation, and that for two reasons. 1. Reason is blind in the things of God. Sin hath brought a great darkness and blindness upon our understandings, so that there is no right reason in the things of God without a supernatural revelation: For *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (n). Reason is not a proportionable and fit faculty for discerning things after this manner. There must always be a proportion and suitableness between the object and the faculty. Divine things cannot be seen but by a divine light. 2. Reason, in natural men, is an enemy to the right knowledge of God. There are *imaginings and high things that exalt themselves against this knowledge* (o). Carnal and un sanctified reason, in natural men, riseth up in arms against the knowledge of God, as revealed in the gospel, by sophistical argumentations and heighths of false reasoning. Hence it is said, that *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him* (p). By *the things of the Spirit*, we are to understand such things as depend only on divine revelation, and cannot be known by nature: *The natural man receiveth them not*; that is, though he may understand the phrases and sentences by which they are expressed in scripture, and may be able to discourse of them to others; yet he hath no spiritual sense or relish of them; he doth not receive, embrace and close with them: For they are folly to him, being contrary to his false reasonings.

(3.) Men

(n) 1 Cor. ii. 14. (o) 2 Cor. x. 4. (p) 1 Cor. ii. 14.

(3.) Men cannot be the authors of saving and practical knowledge. The best ministers in the world cannot give you *an heart to know God*. Man's teaching may fill your head with notions of God, but cannot give you a true heart-affecting knowledge of him. Man's teaching reacheth the ear, but cannot reach the heart. And doth not the sad experience of many of you bear witness to the truth of this? You have lived many years under the gospel, and have been long taught by men; yet you know nothing of God savingly: Why? Because, though you have heard the voice of man speaking to your ear, yet you never heard the voice of God speaking into your heart.

2. Positively. Saving knowledge is of a divine original: God alone can give *an heart to know him*. It is wrought in us, by the holy Spirit. Hence the apostle prayed for the Ephesians, *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him (q)*. God alone can teach us the saving knowledge of himself. We must be *taught of God*, and *hear and learn of the Father (r)*. This is *an unction from the holy One (s)*. It is *a light that springeth from the Father of lights (t)*. It is an effect of God's shining into the heart: *God hath shined into our hearts, says the apostle, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (u)*.

But how doth God teach the saving and practical knowledge of himself? How doth he give *an heart to know him*?

(1.) By his blessed word, as the external instrumental cause. The word is the mean he is pleased to use in this matter. Therefore the gospel is called *the ministration of the Spirit (x)*. Because thereby the spirit of wisdom and revelation is instrumentally conveyed to the soul. And the word of God is a fit mean for this end: For therein God gives us a full and clear revelation of himself, and of his mind and will. The Bible is a book that God hath written of himself, as Cæsar did write his own commentaries. God is the great subject of the scriptures; and *God manifested in the flesh*, is the great subject of the gospel. Therein are discovered the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The scriptures are a looking glass wherein we may behold the clearest reflections of God. They are a prospect by which we may behold more of the glorious greatness, wisdom,

and

(q) Eph. i. 17, 18. (r) John vi. 45. (s) John ii. 20.
(t) James i. 17. (u) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (x) 2 Cor. iii. 8.

and grace of God, than all rational discoveries can present unto us.

(2.) By his Spirit, as the efficient cause, working by and with the word in our hearts. Hence he is called *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation* (y). And the work of the Spirit in this matter, lies in these two things. 1. The Spirit enlightens the eyes of the understanding. Hence the apostle prays for the Ephesians, *that God might give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened* (z). And when our blessed Lord taught his disciples, it is said, *He opened their understandings* (a). If he as God had not opened their understandings, his teaching them as man had been lost labour. So Elihu tells us, *There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding* (b). Our understandings are so blinded by sin, that a spiritual illumination is no less necessary than an external revelation. No external light can discover an object to us, unless there be a seeing faculty in the eye: A blind man cannot see at noon-day. Hence the psalmist prays, *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law* (c). Now, the Spirit enlightens the eyes. (1.) By removing the dark vail of ignorance that blinds the mind. (2.) By infusing light. *He shines into the heart* (d). God first opens a window in the soul, and then the light breaks in. The day-star ariseth in the heart, and a divine light is sprang up in the soul. 2. The Spirit reveals and manifests God to the soul. As he takes the dark vail off the heart; so he takes the vail from the face of God, that we may get a clear discovery of him. God alone can make himself known. As the sun is not seen but by his own light; so God cannot be seen but by the light of his own Spirit. *In thy light, says the psalmist, we shall see light* (e). None can force the vail from his face against his mind. Hence it is that an inward revelation is no less necessary than an outward one. Of that we read in these texts, *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me. Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven* (f). Whence is it that the same sermon is as a clear vision to one, and as a dark

(y) Eph. i. 17. (z) Eph. i. 17. (a) Luke xxiv. 45. (b) Job xxxii. 8. (c) Psal cxix. 18. (d) 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15, 16 2 Cor. iv. 6. (e) Psal. xxxvi. 9. (f) Mat. xi. 25. Gal. i. 15. Mat. xvi. 17.

dark riddle to another? It is because God manifests himself to one, and not to another. The gospel is hid to some, and manifested to others (g).

Fourth, I proceed to shew that God gives this blessing of the saving and practical knowledge of himself to all whom he takes into covenant with him. This needs not much proof; therefore I shall not insist upon it. Only, it is clear from these things.

1. It is a blessing promised in the covenant; as in my text, and that of the prophet, *They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them* (h). And this is one of the absolute promises, and is therefore made good to all that are taken into covenant with God. In the promises, the truth and faithfulness of God are laid in pawn. He cannot go back of his word. He is the faithful God, that keepeth covenant and mercy with his people.

2. It is a blessing purchased by Christ. The propitiation Christ made upon the cross, is the procuring cause of the knowledge of God. *They shall all know me*, says the Lord; *for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more* (i). Sin drew a dark vail between God and us; but Christ, by his sacrifice, rent the vail asunder, that we might see God. There were dark clouds of sin between God and us, till the Sun of righteousness scattered them. Now, all that believe on Christ have a right to the blessings of his purchase; for by faith in Christ we are mystically one with him; so that he and all he hath becomes ours (k): But so it is that all that are taken into covenant with God, believe on Christ; for it is by believing on him, that we enter into covenant.

3. Christ is promised in the covenant for this end, to cure his people of their spiritual blindness, and to teach them saving and sound knowledge. So, the Father is brought in speaking to Christ, *I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes* (l). He is promised as a prophet; *The Lord thy God*, says Moses, *will raise up unto thee a prophet, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken* (m). And it is Christ's work, as a prophet, to teach his people the saving knowledge of God.

4. An heart to know God must needs be the blessing of all his covenanted people, because without it there can be no

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true

(g) 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 6. (h) Jer. xxxi. 34. (i) Jer. xxxi. 2. (k) Eph. iii. 17. (l) Isa. xlii. 6, 7. (m) Deut. xviii. 15.

true religion, and consequently no salvation. God hath so ordered it, that the knowledge of God is the first step to salvation; so that none can be saved, but such as come in the way of the knowledge of God, as he is revealed in the gospel. Hence the apostle says, *He will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (n)*. The understanding being the leading faculty, must first be enlightened. The illumination of the mind is first, and then the inclinations of the will follow. Now, God in his gracious operations, though he cross corrupt nature, yet he never crosseth the natural order of the faculties of the soul. He draws *with the cords of a man (o)*. He first opens the understanding, and then inclines the will.

5. The saving knowledge of God hath a necessary connection with other covenant-blessings. Regeneration and sanctification do necessarily imply *an heart to know the Lord*: For the first work of grace in regeneration is the illumination of the mind. Hence, *the new man is said to be renewed in knowledge (p)*: And we are said to be *transformed by the renewing of our mind (q)*. As in the first creation, the first creature that God made was *light*; so in the new creation, God's first work is the enlightening of the mind with the saving knowledge of himself. This blessing hath also a necessary connection with peace with God, access to him, and communication with him; for till we have *an heart to know him*, we cannot seek peace with him, nor value and pursue after communion with him.

S E R M O N III.

Fifthly, **F**OLLOWS the application of this doctrine.

Use 1. For lamentation, in two branches.

Lament. 1. Alas, that so many are destitute of this great covenant-blessing. Oh, how much ignorance of God is there even among us? Alas, he is an unknown God even to many that are called by his name.

First, Many are grossly ignorant of God. I am afraid that many even among you that hear the gospel, are destitute of that measure of knowledge that is absolutely necessary to salvation. The sun, moon and stars, and all the creatures about you, and your own consciences within you, proclaim

(n) 1 Tim. ii. 4. (o) Hos. xi. 4. (p) Col. iii. 10. (q) Rom. xii. 2.

proclaim that there is a God : But how little do you know of his nature and glorious perfections, as he hath revealed himself in his blessed word? So that, though you multiply acts of worship, yet that inscription may be engraven upon them, *To the unknown God (a)*.

This ignorance of God that is to be found in some of you is a sad and woful evil. For,

1. It is most sinful. It is a breach of the first command, whereby we are required to know God. Yea, it is a breach of an expresse command: *Know thou the God of thy fathers (b)*. And it is in many a wilful and affected ignorance, and consequently the more sinful. The apostle speaks of some who are *willingly ignorant (c)*. Such are many of you; you are not desirous of the knowledge of God; you live in a careless neglect of the means of knowledge. Though the light of his word and gospel shine round about you, yet you shut your eyes against it, and will not suffer it to shine into your hearts.

2. It is most shameful. Hence the apostle says, *Some have not the knowledge of God, I speak this to your shame (d)*. It is so, upon a twofold account. 1. Because of the many obligations that lie upon us to study the knowledge of God. In him we live, move, and have our being. He daily loadeth us with benefits; and gives us richly all things to enjoy; and fills our hearts with food and gladness. Is it not matter of shame, to be ignorant of our great and bountiful Benefactor? 2. Because, under the gospel, we have many means, helps, advantages and opportunities for attaining the knowledge of God, above and beyond others. The poor heathens had no other teachers but the sun, moon and stars, and other creatures, together with the works of Providence; And though the Jews under the Old Testament had far better and clearer instruction than they; yet God was more obscurely revealed unto them than he is unto us. The glory of God was then wrapt up in clouds of sacrifices, ceremonies and other shadows: But now, it shines to us *in the face of Jesus Christ (e)*: And *we behold the glory of the Lord with open face (f)*. Gospel light is like *the light of seven days (g)*, in comparison of what it was under the Old Testament. O then, what a shame is it to be ignorant of God under such
a clear

(a) Act xvii. 23. (b) 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. (c) 2 Pet. iii. 5.
(d) 1 Cor. xv. 34. (e) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (f) 2 Cor. iii. 18.
(g) Isa. xxx. 26.

a clear dispensation, and such plenty of the means of knowledge? This is an argument, either of great slothfulness and negligence in the use of the means, or of great dulness and incapacity; and both these are matter of shame.

3. It renders the condition of your soul most miserable. For,

(1.) It is an inlet to all sin and wickedness. Ignorance of God is a sin that never goes single, but hath many other sins accompanying it. *There is no knowledge of God in the land*, says the prophet, and then it follows, *by swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood* (h). As saving knowledge is the root of all other graces; so is ignorance of God the root of all other sins.

(2.) It keeps the soul secure in sin. As darkness inclines men to sleep; so ignorance lays the soul and conscience asleep. The blind and ignorant are *fast feeling* (i). Such as are grossly ignorant, want light to let them see their sin and danger by it, and therefore sleep securely. They have neither fear nor shame: They sin without blushing, because they see not their guilt; and they are not afraid, because they know not their danger.

(3.) It is a sign of a graceless state. For, as I said, God's first work in conversion is the enlightening of the mind. If your understanding be not enlightened, you are yet in an unrenewed state, void of saving grace. If you want the knowledge of God, you are none of his: For, as I already cleared, this is a blessing God gives to all that are in covenant with him: *I will give them an heart to know me*, says he; *and they shall all know me* (k). Therefore, if you want the knowledge of God, you are none of his covenanted people: You have no interest in the promises. Your ignorance is inconsistent with true Christianity. You do not deserve the name of Christians, who have not the necessary knowledge of Christians: You have a pagan heart under a Christian name.

(4.) Ignorant souls are under the power of the devil. He hath his throne in dark hearts. Therefore the devils are called *the rulers of the darkness of this world* (l). Your ignorance is the chain whereby the devil holds you captives and prisoners. Therefore, the darkness of the mind, and the power of Satan, are connected, in that expression, *To open their*

(h) Hof. iv. 1. (i) Eph. iv. 18. (k) Jer. xxxi. 34. (l) Eph. vi. 12.

their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (m). Your darkness and blindness chains your soul to the devil. After many years travel toward heaven, as you think, by your good meanings, and your blind and ignorant devotions, you will find yourselves to be where you were at first, as very slaves to the devil as ever.

(5). Gross ignorance of God is the path-way to eternal ruin and destruction. *My people, says the Lord, are destroyed for lack of knowledge (n).* Many ignorant sinners are apt to think that God will pity them, and shew them mercy, because they know not better. But what says the Lord by the prophet? *It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour (o).* And the apostle tell us, *that Christ Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God (p).* There is vengeance for heathens, that know not God: How much greater vengeance must be reserved for professed Christians, who continue ignorant of God, under such special advantages and means of knowledge! If poor pagans, who had no other teachers than the works of creation and providence, will be damned for their ignorance of God, what will become of you who do not profit under gospel light? Surely your judgment will be much more intolerable. The apostle says, *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost (q).* And if Satan's hiding this gospel from you, is a sign of a lost state; how much more your hiding it from yourselves, by your own wilfulness and obstinacy?

Second, Many, who have some speculative knowledge of God, have nothing of the practical and saving knowledge of him. Many of you please yourselves with notions of God, as children please themselves with pictures in a book, but know not the learning that is in it. You do not know God, so as to love, serve, and delight in him. You have an *head* but not an *heart* to know him. This is so evident, as to many of you, that it needs no proof. You have no such knowledge of God as affects your heart, and influences your life and practice. Your want of love to God, delight in him, and zeal for his glory, is an evidence that there are many dark

(m) Act. xxvi. 18. (n) Hos. iv. 6. (o) Isa. xxvii. 11.
(p) 2 Thess. i. 8. (q) 2 Cor. iv. 4.

dark clouds between him and your understanding. You have no sound knowledge of the justice of God, if you do not tremble at it; nor any favour of his holiness, unless you imitate it. And whatever notions you have of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus; yet the mystery of Christ is veiled to your eyes, unless you feel the virtue of his death and resurrection upon your own hearts.

Lament. 2. Alas, that even believers in Christ are so defective in the knowledge of God. True it is, a perfection in knowledge is not attainable in this life: In this respect the best and most knowing Christians do know but in part. Yet, is it not lamentable that even you who are the children of God come far short of what you might and ought to know of God? This gives Satan great advantage against you. *He is the ruler of the darkness of this world (r).* Therefore the more darkness and ignorance be in you, he hath the more advantage against your soul. Again, this is the cause why you are so defective in point of grace and holiness. For, knowledge is a leading principle in the soul; all other graces follow it in a due measure and proportion. According to your knowledge of God, so is your faith in him, and love to him. They that know God most, love him best. If you knew him more, you would love him better, and trust him more. But now, other graces are so weak and defective, because your knowledge is so.

Use 2. For reproof. To them who though they set themselves to the study of the knowledge of God, and are at pains in the use of the means; yet neglect God in the matter, and do not own him. It is a sure sign that you trust in the means, and depend upon your own parts and abilities, when in the use of means you neglect God, and do not humbly depend on him for instruction. And your diligence in the use of means is lost labour, as to any saving knowledge, when you do not seek to God; for he alone can open your understanding, and reveal and manifest himself to your soul.

Use 3. For exhortation. O study the knowledge of God: And study to know him as he hath revealed himself in Christ: And let no knowledge of God satisfy you but what is practical and saving. Let it be your business to get *an heart to know God*; such a knowledge as affecteth your heart, and influenceth your life and practice. And you
that

that have some knowledge of God, study, to know him more, and to better purpose.

For exciting and quickening you to this, I propose these considerations.

Consider. 1. Great obligations lie upon you to study the knowledge of God. You are *the offspring of God (s)*. You are his creatures, and he is your great Creator: And will you not study to know him that made you? As he made you, so he hath preserved you, and followed you with goodness and mercy all the days of your life. It is by his providence, that you have food and raiment, or riches and wealth, and all the blessings you enjoy. And is an unthankful ignorance of God a worthy requital of all his kindness? But he hath done yet much more than all this. He hath brought about a glorious redemption, not for fallen angels, but for some of the lost posterity of Adam, such vile wretched sinners as you are: And in this glorious redemption, he hath given a full and clear discovery of himself. The glorious angels pry into those things; and are not ye much more concerned than they?

Consider. 2. The saving knowledge of God is an excellent blessing. I cleared this already. But let me add a few things more to this purpose.

1. Man's happiness lies in it. The knowledge of other things cannot confer a happiness on man. Only the saving knowledge of God in Christ can satisfy the vast desires of the soul; therefore that alone can make us happy. In this consists the happiness of the glorious angels—*Their angels*, says our Lord, *do always behold the face of my Father (t)*. Yea, God's own happiness lies in the knowledge of himself, and his glorious perfections, and the infinite delight he hath therein. He hath nothing to contemplate that is greater or better than himself. The contemplation of himself was that which gave him a satisfaction before the world was made; and this would still be his happiness, though all things he hath made were turned into nothing. And seeing God's happiness lies in the knowledge of himself, surely our happiness can consist in nothing else.

2. It is heaven begun. *This is life eternal*, says Christ, *that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (u)*. The happiness of heaven lies in the sight and

(s) A&. xvii. 29.
xvii. 3.

(t) Mat. xviii. 10.

(u) John

and knowledge of God. *Then we shall know, even as also we are known* (x). *Blessed are the pure in heart, says our Lord, for they shall see God* (y). And the apostle tells us, *We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is* (z). One glimpse of the glory of God in heaven, will better our knowledge more than ten thousand years study upon earth could do. Now, if heaven's happiness consist in the knowledge of God, then the saving knowledge of God here is heaven begun; we thereby enter into the suburbs of glory.

3. Compare the saving knowledge of God with all other knowledge, and the excellency thereof appears in these.

(1). Other knowledge cannot yield you solid satisfaction. It only satisfies your curiosity, and is a stone instead of bread. It cannot strike off one link of the chain of your spiritual darkness, nor fortify your soul against hell and death. But the saving knowledge of God will satisfy your desires, and nourish your souls: It will be bread to your hunger, and light to your eyes, and music to your ears, and a cordial to your hearts.

(2). All other knowledge is of no value without this. Other knowledge is but the knowledge of trifles in comparison of it. *Only the knowledge of the holy is understanding* (a). The apostle counted all other knowledge but *less and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ* (b). Therefore you sell your understandings for nought, when you employ them about other things with the neglect of God and Christ.

(3.) All other knowledge is hurtful without this. The apostle tells us, that *the world by wisdom knew not God* (c). The wisest philosophers among the Heathens, in the primitive times, were the greatest enemies to Christianity. And who are they amongst us at this day, that mock at all revealed religion, but they who would be accounted *the wits of the time*, being puffed up with a conceit of their wisdom and knowledge. The sharpest unsanctified wits have always been the devil's greatest tools to promote his kingdom of darkness.

(4). Only the saving knowledge of God, will be comfortable to you at last. Other knowledge may yield you some delight and pleasure at present, but cannot comfort you in the hour of death: But the saving knowledge of God will be to you a treasure of things new and old, to support you under

(x) 1 Cor. xiii. 12. (y) Mat. v. 8. (z) 1 John iii. 2.
(a) Prov. ix. 10. (b) Phil. iii. 8. (c) 1 Cor. i. 21.

under any calamity, and a cordial to your soul when you are stepping into eternity.

(5) All other knowledge brings and increaseth sorrow. The preacher tells us, *He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow; and much study is a weariness of the flesh* (d). There is a great deal of trouble, vexation, grief and discontent, in getting, keeping, and using other knowledge; and oft-times the fear of losing and forgetting what we have attained with much study, doth rack and vex the soul. But the knowledge of God brings and increases joy. It is the end of scripture revelation, that our *joy may be full* (e). There is a sweet perfume and *savour* in the *knowledge* of God (f). The knowledge of such an excellent object cannot but yield an inexpressible sweetness to the soul.

(6) Other knowledge doth but a little help our reason, but cannot restore our understanding to its primitive state, nor cure that crookedness that we have caught by the fall. But the saving knowledge of God, restores and repairs the image of God in the soul. *The new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of God* (g). Other knowledge doth but mend our natures, like an old house patched up: But this renews our natures by its transforming virtue (h).

(7.) Only the saving knowledge of God will be of eternal use and advantage to you. Other knowledge will vanish with your last breath; but this will last for ever. All other knowledge will be of no advantage to you in the other world; there will be no use for it in eternity, whither you are going: But the saving knowledge of God will abide with you, and accompany you into heaven; and there it will be perfected.

Confid. 3. The saving knowledge of God is an attainable blessing, glory to his name. God hath promised it, and Christ hath purchased it, and it is his work, by office, to teach it, as I have cleared already; and many have actually attained it. The believing Romans were *filled with all knowledge* (i). And our blessed Lord testifieth that his disciples knew God savingly in some measure: *And from henceforth, says he, ye know him, and have seen him* (k). Well then, it will not be lost labour to set to the study of this knowledge; and seeing it is attainable, therefore such as remain ignorant of God under the gospel, will be left without excuse. Yea more, it is

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(d) Eccl. i. ult. and xii. 12. (e) 1 John i. 4. (f) 2 Cor. ii. 14.
 (g) Col. iii. 10. (h) 2 Cor. iii. 18. (i) Rom. xv. 14.
 (k) John xiv. 7.

in some respect easy to know God, at least so much as is necessary unto salvation. Any difficulty that is here, lies not in God, or in the means of revelation, but in ourselves; our natural enmity against God, and these unworthy notions we have of God naturally. God hath revealed and made himself known in his word and works; he hath set his footsteps in the creatures, and unveiled his face in the scriptures: so that if you know him not, the fault is in yourselves.

Well then, be persuaded to seek and pursue after the saving knowledge of God in Christ. The time and pains spent this way will come to a good account at last. Angels and men cannot express what sweet pleasure, delight and satisfaction it will yield to you, nor how great an influence it hath upon the whole spiritual life.

But, what shall we do, that we may attain to the saving knowledge of God? For this, take these directions.

1. Get a deep humbling sense of your ignorance of God. Such of you as are most conceited of your knowledge of God, are least capable of learning it: For you think yourselves too good to be taught by men, and you are in no fit frame to be taught by God. You are not fit to enter to Christ's school, till you are ashamed of your ignorance of God, and lament and mourn over it.

2. Resign yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, as your prophet. It is his office to teach poor sinners. *Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him (1).* Therefore receive Christ as he is offered in all his mediatory offices: And particularly, receive him as the great prophet appointed by God, who is furnished with ability and skill to imprint the knowledge of God upon your hearts. When you close with Christ, and set your name to the new covenant, then your indenture is sealed, and Christ becomes your prophet to teach you.

3. Be diligent in the use of the means of knowledge. Be diligently attentive in reading and hearing the word; and meditate on what you read and hear. Meditation is a mean to ingraft the word into your hearts. Be diligent in attending the ordinance of catechising. And be much in Christian conference with one another about God and the things of God. God hath appointed one Christian to be a prophet to another.

4. Because these means and ordinances are of themselves insufficient to work in you any saving knowledge of God,

therefore

(1) Mat. xi. 27.

therefore learn, in the use of them, to own and acknowledge him. Seek to him and depend upon him for the saving light of his Spirit. Cry to God to open the eyes of your understanding, and to give you *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (m)*. He is the best student in the knowledge of God, who studies most upon his knees †.

5. Improve well the little knowledge of God that you have already attained to. This is the way to get more. *To him that hath shall be given*. Improve it, (1.) By teaching others the knowledge of God. Talents, when employed, are increased. The saving knowledge of God is like the widow's oil; it is increased in the pouring out. (2.) By studying a practice conformed to your knowledge. In practical sciences, such as religion is, the skill is more increased by working than by studying. Therefore study to live up to that measure of light you have already received. *O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord (n)*.

S E R M O N IV.

Use 4. **F**OR trial. Try, by what hath been said, whether you are in covenant with God or not. Some serious Christians among you would gladly know, if you may upon good grounds reckon yourselves among the number of God's covenanted people, and lay claim to the blessings and privileges of the new covenant. Now, you may try it by this: Hath God given you *an heart to know him*? Do you know God savingly? You may have an head to know God, an head furnished with some excellent notions of God and Christ, and yet be strangers to God's covenant. Speculative knowledge is not sufficient. The greatest heads have often had the worst hearts. The devil knows more of God and Christ, in a speculative way, than any man on earth. But hath God given you *an heart to know him*? Have you any saving and practical knowledge of him?

How shall we know that? I answer, 1. Negatively. 2. Positively.

First, Negatively. Some things may be taken for the saving knowledge of God, that are not so. And,

1. There may be a kind of delight in the speculations of God, where there is no saving knowledge of him. There is a delight and pleasure in the contemplation of any truth, much

(m) Eph. i. 17. † *Bene orasse est bene studuisse.* Isa. ii. 6,

much more in the contemplation of the highest and noblest truth. The notions of God may be pleasant to your soul, when a conformity to him in holiness is very unpleasant. There may be a delight in the speculations of God in your minds, when there are no serious endeavours to better your hearts.

2. There is a knowledge of God and Christ that may have some good effects in a man's life, which yet is not a saving knowledge. This is clear from that which the apostle tells us, *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning (a)*. It is evident that the apostle is not there speaking of the saving knowledge of Christ; for he speaks of them whose *latter end is worse than their beginning*, and for whom it had been better not to have known the way of righteousness, and to whom the *mist of darkness is reserved for ever (b)*. But he speaks only of a common, general and speculative knowledge of Christ and gospel truths. Now, through this common and general knowledge, some may escape the pollutions of the world: That is, they may have such a knowledge of Christ as cleanseth their external conversation, though they have no saving knowledge of him. Though they have no gracious spiritual illumination; yet they may have such a rational conviction of the truths of the gospel, as may engage them to abstain from gross sins, and practise external duties, and walk blamelessly before the world.

Second, Positively. You may know if you have the saving knowledge of God or not, by these marks or evidences.

1. The saving knowledge of God is always attended with humility. Isaiah, when he saw the Lord, did sink into nothing in his own thoughts: *Wo is me, says he, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts (c)*. And, says Job, *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (d)*. It is the nature of other knowledge to puff up a man; but this pulleth down the spirit. A man that knows God savingly, cannot look on his infinite holiness and righteousness, but presently his pride

(a) 2 Pet. ii. 20.
(d) Job xlii. 5, 6.

(b) *Ibid.* 21. and 17.

(c) Isa. vi. 5.

pride is dashed out of countenance, and all his excellency appears to be a mere senseless shadow. Well then, try yourselves by this. If your knowledge of God exalt your pride and self-conceit, and if it be thus in the habitual frame and disposition of your heart, then it is but a common and literal knowledge: But if it strip you of all conceit of self-worth; if it humble you under the sense of your own vileness and nothingness, so that you cannot think of God without loathing yourselves, then your knowledge is saving.

2. The saving knowledge of God begets a bewailing sense of our ignorance of him. It is thus even in natural knowledge; the more a man knoweth, he is the more sensible of his ignorance. Socrates, the heathen philosopher, though he was one of the most knowing men in his age, yet he professed † that he knew nothing. It is much more so in spiritual and saving knowledge. A man that knows God savingly, is sensible that what he knows is inconceivably less than what he is ignorant of. And as he is sensible of this, so he laments and bewails it; as we see in Agur, one of the wisest men in that age. Surely, says he, *I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man; I have neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy* (e). And this he spoke with reference to the knowledge he had of God, as appears from verse 4th. Well then, try yourselves by this. Some serious Christians there are that lament and mourn over their ignorance of God; the thoughts of it wound them to the heart. But be comforted, serious soul; the little knowledge thou hast is truly saving. It is a beam of saving light from above, that discovers the remaining darkness that is in thee. But, on the other hand, many of you were never sensible of, nor mourned over your ignorance: Surely, such of you have no saving knowledge. They that know most of God, are most sensible that they know but very little of him. If you were privy to their secret complaints and regrets to God of their own case, you would hear many sad lamentations over their ignorance.

3. Where the saving knowledge of God is, there will be ardent desires to know more of him, and such desires as are never satisfied till it be perfected in heaven. All true knowledge sharpens the appetite for more. Such as know God savingly, will *follow on to know him* (f). It is not possible that

† *Hoc unum scio, quod nihil scio.*
(f) Hof. vi. 3.

(e) Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

that they can have any saving knowledge, who rest satisfied with what they have, and do not desire and endeavour to grow in knowledge. But if that measure of knowledge you have, cannot content you, so that you pant earnestly after more, and there is nothing you desire more than to have the eyes of your understanding more fully opened, that you may see more of the glory of God; then is your knowledge of God truly saving.

4. The saving knowledge of God vents itself in holiness and obedience to him. All pretenders to divine knowledge, who do not make conscience of obedience to the commands of God, are liars in his account. *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (g).* Hence is David's exhortation to Solomon. *And thou Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him (h).* The more a man knows of God savingly, the more he will love him; and the more he loves God, the more will he serve and obey him. Therefore Josiah's obedience is noticed by the Lord as an evidence of the right knowledge of him. *He judged the cause of the poor and needy, then it was well with him: was not this to know me, saith the Lord (i)?* Without gospel-obedience, a professed Christian knows no more of God savingly than a mere Heathen. Well then, what influence hath your knowledge of God upon your life and practice? Alas, many are Christians in knowledge, but Pagans in life; they profess to know God, but in their works deny him. Such know nothing of God as they ought to know. But if your knowledge of God engage you in the serious study of a gospel-conversation; if it quicken you to universal and sincere obedience; then is it of a divine stamp and original.

5. The saving knowledge of God draws the soul to an imitation of him, and transforms it into his likeness. When the glory of God is seen in the glass of the gospel, there is a divine beauty conveyed to the soul. *We all, says the apostle, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (k).* The gospel is such a glass, as not only represents the object, but changes the soul into its image. The saving knowledge of God first begets love to him; and then love studies to draw the picture of the party

(g) 1 John ii. 4. (h) 2 Chron. xxviii. 9. (i) Jer. xxii. 16.
(k) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

party beloved. Well then, doth your knowledge of God quicken you to the study of more conformity and likeness to him? Is it your earnest desire and endeavour to be holy as he is holy, to be merciful as he is? Do you vent your love to others in imitation of his love to you? Do you know Christ's holiness, meekness, humility, and self-denial, so as to write after this copy, by studying to be holy, meek, humble and self-denied, as he was? Then it is a saving knowledge.

6. The saving knowledge of God warms the heart and affections toward God and Christ. This spiritual light cannot be without a spiritual heat. The light that shines in the head, kindles a love to God in the heart. It is said of the two disciples going to Emmaus, *Their eyes were opened, and their hearts burned within them (l)*. And the apostle tells us, *He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love (m)*. If the want of love to others, much more the want of love to God, is an argument that we do not know him savingly. Such as know God savingly, have seen him in the light of his own Spirit, and have got such a discovery of his glory, excellency and beauty, that their souls cannot chuse but love him, and delight in him. Well then, what love have you to God? What desires after the enjoyment of him? What delight in your approaches to him? Doth your knowledge of God kindle desires, and holy affections, and heart-breakings for him? Alas, many pretend to know God, but they love other things better than him, and have more ardent desires after the world than ever they had after God. But if your knowledge of God warm your heart, and enliven and quicken your affections after God and Christ, then it is saving.

7. The saving knowledge of God is a reforming knowledge, and not informing only. To this purpose is that which the apostle says, *But ye have not so learned Christ: If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind (n)*. If you have been taught of God, and know him savingly; then you have so learned Christ as to put off the old man with his deeds. You never knew God aright, unless your knowledge reform your drunkenness, profane swearing,

(l) Luke xxiv. 31, 32. (m) 1 John iv. 8. (n) Eph iv. 20, 21, 22.

ing, Sabbath-breaking, and other abominations. Gifts in the head, without grace in the heart, will not avail you. Others are ignorant of God in their minds; but you deny him in your lives: They suspect the truth of religion, but you deny the power of it. It is most certain that you know nothing of God savingly, unless your knowledge reform your hearts and lives.

Use 5. For exhortation. To such of you as have the saving knowledge of God. Hath God given you an heart to know him? Hath he shined into your hearts to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ? Have you a humbling, transforming, heart-affecting, reforming and practical knowledge of God? Then let me exhort you to these following duties.

1. Admire the grace and goodness of God to you. Many of you to whom God hath given an heart to know him, are but babes in comparison of many others: Yet God hath revealed such things to you as the wisest in the world never knew. Now, that God should pass by so many wise and learned men, and reveal himself to the like of you, O what a wonder of free and sovereign grace is here! The children of God are often made to admire this. *Lord how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world (o)?* Well then, let this be matter of admiration to you. It will be so in heaven: And how sweet is it to begin heaven's work here on earth.

2. Bless God and be thankful. *It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (p).* The greatest carnal scholar that ever was, never had one such apprehension of God and divine truths as you have. Therefore give thanks to God, as our Lord did: *I than thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes (q).* If the day-star had not arisen in your heart, then you had perished for ever in your own dreams and delusions. Therefore, though it be little, yet if it be a true and saving light, bless God for it. *Shew forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkness to his marvellous light (r).*

3. Comfort yourselves in God. Your saving knowledge of God is an evidence of a gracious state, a special gift of God's love to you, and a sure pawn and pledge of future glory.

(o) John xiv. 22. (p) Matth. xiii. 11. (q) Matth. xi. 25.
(r) 1 Pet. ii. 9.

glory. What would you have more than eternal life? Here it is. *This is life eternal, that they might know thee, &c. (s).* The least spark of saving knowledge is a pawn and pledge of more: For he that hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (t). Therefore, comfort and bless yourselves in God. Blessed are your eyes, for they see. If Christ were here in the flesh, he would bless you, as he did Peter; *Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven (u).*

4. Mourn over your remaining ignorance of God. All that you know of God is considerably less than what you are ignorant of. O how small a portion do you know of him? Ponder these two things. 1. God's incomprehensible nature. He dwells in that light that is inaccessible, and clothes himself with light as with a garment. He makes darkness his pavilion and secret place (x). His name is secret, and wonderful (y). *What is his name, or his Son's name, if thou canst tell (z)?* 2. Your own blindness and incapacity. The scales fall off from your eyes only by degrees, so that much of your natural blindness still remaineth. Hence, you see but darkly, and know but in part (a). All that are savingly enlightened, go mourning to their graves over their blindness and ignorance.

5. Grow in the knowledge of God. This is called *a following on to know the Lord (b).* Be always making progress. *Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection (c).* Let your knowledge be like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day (d). There is a ripe age and a manly stature in understanding that you should aim at. *In understanding be men (e).* Even the glorious angels, who know much of God, do still desire to know more. Therefore after the apostle had spoken of the glorious mysteries of the gospel, he adds, *Which things the angels desire to look into (f).* Study to imitate them in their search and inquiry into gospel truths and mysteries. This is necessary to your growth in grace. Hence the apostle exhorts, *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (g).*

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(s) John xvii. 3. (t) Phil. i. 6. (u) Mat. xvi. 17. (x) Psal. xiii. 11. (y) Judges xiii. 18. (z) Prov. xxx. 4. (a) 1 Cor. xiii. 12. (b) Hos. vi. 3. (c) Heb. vi. 1. (d) Prov. iv. 18. (e) 1 Cor. xiv. 20. (f) 1 Pet. i. 12. (g) 2 Pet. iii. 18.

6. Improve your knowledge of God by walking suitably and answerably thereunto. Take heed of sinning against knowledge. Nothing doth so break the bones, and scourge the soul with remorse, as sins against light. And sins of omission are aggravated by knowledge, as well as sins of commission. Therefore take heed, not only of committing sin, but of neglecting duty, against your light. *Walk in the light (b)*. A master doth not set up a candle that the servants may be idle, but that they that are in the house may work: So, God having set up such a light in your soul, be diligent about your Master's work and business. *O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord (i)*.

7. Long to be in heaven. It is but a small measure of the knowledge of God that you have here; but in heaven it will be perfected. O what a vast difference there is between any knowledge of God you have here, and that knowledge of him that you shall have hereafter! In this life we have but a dark sight of him through the glass of ordinances; but then we shall see him immediately, without any intervening mediums: *For now we see through a glass, darkly: But then face to face: Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known (k)*. And if it be so desirable to see God in the glass of ordinances, wherein so little of his glory doth appear; what then will it be to see him immediately, and face to face? There the light shall dart immediately upon the soul, without a reflection from a glass. As the understandings of the glorified saints shall then be dilated and strengthened; so God will make out himself to them in the utmost latitude that they are capable of. O long for that happy state. Certainly, we shall need no more to make us happy, but once to see the face of God. *As for me, says the psalmist, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness (l)*.

Use 6. For comfort. To such of you to whom God hath given *an heart to know him*, who have any measure of the saving and practical knowledge of God in Christ, there are only two things I propose for your comfort.

1. You know more of God than all the carnally wise men in the world do. The most knowing among carnal men know God only by a common illumination: But you know him by a divine infusion. God hath left many wise men with

(b) 1 John i. 7. (i) Isa. ii. 6. (k) 1 Cor. xiii. 12.
(l) Psal. xvii. ult.

with their blind eyes in the dark : But he hath shined into your hearts.

2. That knowledge of God which you have is a special covenant blessing, as I have already cleared from this text, and is therefore an undoubted evidence of your covenant interest. It is a sure mark of a gracious state ; a gift of the Spirit ; a special gift of God's love and favour ; a greater evidence of God's friendship and respect to you, than if he had given you the whole world besides. Therefore, though much darkness and ignorance yet remain, which is very grievous to you ; yet it is comfortable that Christ pities you, and is ready to relieve you in your bewailed ignorance of God : For, *he hath compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way* (m).

(m) Heb. v. 2.

DISCOURSE II.

Of the Being of God.

SERMON V.

Heb. xi. 6. *He that cometh to God must believe that he is*

THE apostle having, in the latter part of the preceding chapter, shewed the believing Hebrews, that faith was a special mean of their perseverance and constancy in their Christian profession, notwithstanding of all their trials, he doth, in this eleventh chapter, illustrate and confirm the excellency and efficacy of faith, by divers instances of the power and efficacy thereof in particular persons, whose example in believing he proposeth unto these Hebrews for their imitation. Having first spoken of the faith of Abel, the second instance he adduceth is that of Enoch, the end and reward of whose faith was his translation : Which he proves thus, because *before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God ; but without faith it is impossible to please him.* And that it is impossible to please God without faith, he proves by giving instance in some foundation-truths, the belief whereof is absolutely necessary : *For he that cometh to*
God

God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

In the text, we have these two things.

1. The subject or person spoken of. *He that cometh to God.* By whom, as appears from the context, we are to understand him that pleaseth God, him that hath access to God's favour, and is accepted with him. Elsewhere, in this epistle, *by coming to God (a)*, is understood, our drawing near to him in the duties of his worship. Therefore such as are called *comers*, verse 1st, are called *worshippers*, verse 2d. But both these may be implied in this phrase; and so, by *him that cometh to God*, understand, him that draweth near to God in the duties of his worship, and would worship God, so as to be accepted of him, and have communion with him.

2. What is required of such an one? what must he do? *He must believe that he is.* That is, he must believe the being or existence of God. The apostle doth not, in this verse, mention all that is necessary to be believed, in order to our coming to God, and our acceptance with him in our worship; he only mentions what must first be believed, as necessary to any act of worship or obedience to God; *We must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder, &c.* That is, we must believe his being and bounty. This must be believed at least, and believed in the first place, if we would worship or please God: But this is not all that must be believed. What more is required, is elsewhere declared in the holy scriptures.

The doctrine I shall speak to from these words, is this.

This principle, That God is, is the first principle of faith, and the firm belief thereof is necessary to all our worship.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall shew,

1. *How this is a point of faith, That God is.*
2. *That it is the first principle of faith.*
3. *What necessity there is of proving and demonstrating this truth.*
4. *By what arguments it may be evinced.*
5. *I shall apply the doctrine.*

First, Let me shew, how this is a principle of faith, That God is. For seeing the being of God is known by the light of nature, and consequently is an object of natural knowledge,

(a) Heb. x. 1.

ledge, how then is it here proposed to our faith, which is merely of things supernatural, and known only by revelation? I answer, in these three particulars.

1. The same truth may, in divers respects, be an object both of faith and of reason; when that which is discoverable by natural reason, is more clearly and distinctly proposed to faith by divine revelation. As for example, the creation of the world, of which the apostle speaks here, verse 3d, *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.* We understand this, even by natural reason; but we understand it more clearly and distinctly, by faith founded upon divine revelation. In this case, though a man assent to a truth on principles of reason; yet the new evidence given to it by divine revelation, confirms his mind more in the persuasion of it. So here, *the being of God* is an article, both of our reason, and of our faith. It is an article of our reason, as it shines forth to us in the creatures; and an article of faith, as it breaks forth upon us in the holy scriptures. It is true, faith is properly only of these things that are above reason, and depend merely upon revelation; what is demonstrable by nature's light, is properly an object of reason: Yet in regard of the new and clear evidence given to it by divine revelation, it is also an object of faith.

2. There is a great difference between assenting to a truth, upon principles of reason, and assenting to the same truth upon divine revelation. A man may yield a moral and transient assent to the being of God on principles of reason; but he cannot yield a spiritual and saving fixed assent to it without faith. We must have a divine revelation, ere we can savingly believe this truth, *That God is.*

3. The apostle is here speaking of such a belief of God's being, as encourages sinners to come to him, and is founded on divine revelation. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is.* That is, He must believe that God is in such a manner as he hath revealed himself in the holy scriptures; viz. One in three Persons: For, if we imagine a God out of a Trinity, we form an idol to ourselves. Therefore, it is observable that the apostle doth not say, *he that cometh to God, must believe that there is a God;* but must believe *that he is:* That is, He must believe, that he who is one in three persons, hath a being and existence. And agreeable hereunto is that which our Lord says, in his prayer to the Father, *This is*
life

(b) John xvii. 3.

life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God (b). He who is God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one in three persons, is the only true God. So that we do not believe the existence of the only true God, unless we believe the existence of that God who is one in three persons: And the belief of this is founded only upon divine revelation.

Second, I shall next shew you that this is the first principle of faith, *That God is.* It is the supreme truth, and fundamental to all religion. The main work of religion is to draw our souls to God; and the chief ground and reason for this, is the truth of his being: Therefore, unless we believe his being, all religion falls to the ground. The belief of *God's being* is fundamental both to faith and worship. 1. To faith. All the truths of religion spring from this as their common principle: And all our doubts arise from the want of a firm belief of the being of God. 2. To worship: For *he that cometh to God, must believe that he is.* If we have not right notions of this truth, we cannot perform any worship or service to God *. We must first believe that *God is*, else we can pay him no homage. Without the belief of this, all worship would be but a foolish custom and empty formality, and all religion would soon be abolished: No man would be touched with any care of religion, or concern to have the favour of God. On the other hand, all acts of worship would be managed with the more awe and reverence, if once this principle were firmly laid up in the heart, *That God is.*

Third, I proceed to shew what necessity there is, of proving and demonstrating the existence of God. Some think this unnecessary, because it is the most manifest, clear, and evident truth in the world; and because it is so universally owned and believed. But the proof and demonstration of this principle, *That God is*, is necessary upon these accounts.

1. Because, as I have shewed, it is fundamental to all religion. Therefore it must be laid as the foundation of all our worship and approaches to God; and firmly laid, as foundation stones used to be. The whole building totters, if the foundation be out of course. This being the supreme truth, and so fundamental, it ought to be laid up with the greater certainty and assurance, and our belief of it ought to be founded on undeniable evidence.

2. Because of the great growth of atheism in the generation wherein we live. No disease is so universal, and so hardly cured as this is. It is indeed disguised under several shapes,

* *Primus est deorum cultus Deos credere.* Sen.

shapes, and is not openly avowed and professed: Yet swarms of atheists are more observable in our time than in any age past. Scoffing at religion, and bare-faced debauchery, do evidence, at least, a careless belief of this truth, *That God is*, And such kind of surmises, *that there is no God*, arise in the hearts of many in whom they do not grow to settled atheism. *The fool*, says the psalmist, *both said in his heart, there is no God* (c). And the context there is quoted by the apostle, to prove the natural degeneracy of all men (d). Every unregenerate man is a kind of atheist. There is something in his heart that is ever rising up against the being of God: A root of atheism that sometimes springs up in foolish imaginations, inordinate affections, and secret wishes. Yea, there is secret atheism in the hearts of the best. The children of God are sometimes assaulted with this temptation, *Is there a God?* Atheistical thoughts and suggestions do often haunt them. Therefore it will not be lost labour, to settle the belief of this supreme truth, that the light of it may reflect upon our consciences, and that we may batter down the atheism that is in our hearts.

3. To revive the remembrance of God in our minds. Alas, we are apt to forget him. Wicked men are described by this; they are called such as *forget God* (e). Yea, good men do not meditate and think of God with that frequency they ought to do. Alas, we satisfy ourselves with careless, slight and transient glances, and do not settle in the thoughts of God. Thoughts of him do sometimes rush into our minds; but, like unwelcome guests, they are not entertained there: Why? What is the cause? It is because the truth of God's being is not so charged home upon the heart as it ought to be. It is said of the wicked man, *God is not all in his thoughts* (f). Some render the words thus, *all his thoughts are, that there is no God*. The one maketh way for the other. Therefore it may be of great use to prosecute this argument a little, that your minds may be held in the view of this truth, and that you may enlarge yourselves in the thoughts of God.

4. This cannot but be satisfying to serious Christians. Some of you have, through grace, chosen God for your God and portion. Your hearts are set upon him, and your desires are carried out after him, and your delight is in him. You have

(c) Psal. xiv. 1.

(d) Rom. iii. 10.

(e) Psal. l. 22.

(f) Psal. x. 4.

have taken him for your all, and resolve to seek all your happiness in him, and have counted all things but loss and dung for him. Now, it cannot but yield great satisfaction to you, to take a view of these convincing demonstrations, that reason affords of the being of that God whom your hearts have centered upon. O, how refreshing must it be, to see every creature justify you, in your owning, choosing and adoring him!

Fourth, I go on to shew you by what arguments we may prove and evince this supreme truth, *That God is*.

And I premise, that this truth is demonstrable by natural reason: therefore the holy scriptures do often send us to take a view of the creatures for a discovery of God; and the apostles drew arguments to prove the being of God, from topics of nature, which they would not have done, if this truth were not demonstrable by natural reason (g). Hence it is, as a noble author observes †, that God never wrought a miracle for evincing his being against any atheist. Indeed, miracles, when they are wrought, are evident demonstrations of the being of God: But the working of them was never designed, but for the confirmation of supernatural truths.

I now proceed to the arguments for proving the existence of God: and I shall but hint a little at these that are largely handled by divines on this subject.

Arg. 1. From the works of creation. The apostle tells us, *The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead (h).* That is, The invisible perfections of God are in a sort made visible to us in the works he hath made. So the psalmist tells us, *The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech, nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (i).* The world is sometimes compared to a book, and sometimes to a preacher. It is like a great print-book, wherein God hath set forth himself: and the great diversity of creatures in it are as so many letters, out of which we may spell his name. And they preach to us the being of God. Especially the visible heavens, the vast firmament,

† Bacon's Essays.

(g) Rom. i. 19, 20. Act. xiv. 15, 16, 17. (h) Rom. i. 20.
(i) Psal. xix. 1, 2, 3, 4.

firmament, with all its curious furniture, of sun, moon, and stars, do objectively declare to us the glorious perfections of God, his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. And they speak and preach plainly to all nations in their own language. God's attributes are glorious, and *his name excellent in all the earth* (k). Yea, God is seen, not only in that glorious canopy of the visible heavens, but in every insect †, and in every pile of grass; as the image of a prince is stamped on a penny as well as a greater medal.

Let it be considered, that the world, and all the creatures in it, must be from some cause: For, as they had a beginning, and could not be from eternity, seeing their duration is measured by time, which cannot be infinite; so they could not give a being to themselves, seeing nothing can act before it is. And as they must be from some cause; so no creature could be the cause, seeing it is a work of infinite power, to create of nothing, or to give a being to things that had no being before. And if it could be supposed that a creature could be the cause of the production of the world; yet the question would still return, whence that creature had its being, seeing it could not give a being to itself. So that we must come at last to some First Cause, even an infinite, eternal, and independent Being, who hath his being of himself, and is the Author of being to all other beings, and that is God.

This is yet more evident ‡ from the beauty and harmony of all the parts of the world; their subserviency one to another; and the admirable variety and diversity of the creatures. But I may not here insist on these things.

Let me argue a little more particularly from the creation of man. Man is the epitome of the world, and contains in himself the substance of all natures. All the perfections of the several natures in the world are gathered and meet in him. In his soul, he partakes of heaven; in his body, of earth. In him is the life of plants, the sense of beasts, and the intellectual nature of angels. Particularly, 1. Consider the fabric of the body. It is formed like an admirable piece of architecture. We are *fearfully and wonderfully made* (l).

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H

Man's

† *Presentemq; refert qualibet herba Deum.*

‡ *Esse præstantem aliquam æternamque naturam, & eam suspicientem adorandamq; hominum generi, pulchritudo Mundi ordoque rerum cælestium cogit considerari.* Cic. de Divinat. L. 2.

(k) Psal. viii. 1. (l) Psal. cxxxix. 14, 15.

Man's body is curiously and cunningly wrought, with nerves, veins, arteries; like a piece of embroidery or tapestry. Indeed, the artificial structure of the body, the elegance of all the several parts, the proper situation of them, their proportion one to another, and their fitness and usefulness for their several functions, do loudly proclaim the infinite goodness, power and wisdom of the Creator, and that none but God could frame it. Add to all this, the great diversity of faces and features among men, without which there could be no government, no commerce, no preservation of property, nor execution of justice. 2. Consider the nature of the soul. The nobleness and excellency thereof, do plainly shew that it is of a divine original: For it is spiritual and immortal. The soul is the greatest glory of the lower world. And, as one says †, there seems to be no more difference between a soul and an angel, than between a sword in the scabbard, and when it is out of the scabbard. Consider the vastness of its capacity. It is suited to all objects, as the eye is to all colours. Consider also the swiftness of its motion. There is nothing so swift in the whole course of nature. The sun runs round the world in a day; but the soul can run through the world in a moment, and on a sudden think of things that are a thousand miles distant. Certainly, such a noble being cannot be the effect of any material cause. Such a spiritual nature must proceed from a higher spirit than itself, and of a transcendent perfection above it. 3. Consider the union of both. That such a noble being as the soul should be an inhabitant in such a tabernacle of clay; that a body in itself as vile and dull as earth, and a soul of such a noble and active nature; an earthly body, and an immaterial soul, should be linked together by such a strait union: this must needs be the effect of an infinite power. Who but a God could so closely unite such different substances?

When we consider all this, we must own that there is a God that made us, and not we ourselves. We need go no further than ourselves to behold a God: so that we must flee from ourselves before we can put off the notions of a Deity.

S E R M O N VI.

Arg. 2. **F**ROM the works of providence. Even such of the creatures as are destitute of knowledge and understanding, and so cannot be supposed to move by any counsel

† More.

counsel of their own, do yet pursue and attain their ends; which plainly shews that they are under the wise government of some Supreme Being. Again, the comely and beautiful order, and the sweet harmony and agreement of such things as are of different and destructive natures, are plain evidences that there is a powerful and wise God that governs and guides them all: For all would run into disorder and confusion, if not prevented by the art and care of Providence.

Sometimes we are awakened by some notable effects of Providence: Such as miracles, which are beyond the reach of nature, and must therefore be the effects of a Power superior to nature; wonderful deliverances of persons, societies and nations, when they have been on the very brink of ruin; extraordinary judgments on wicked and abominable sinners; strange discoveries of secret murders and bloody plots; the bridling the passions of men for the preservation of human societies. These and many other things are unaccountable, unless we have recourse to a Supreme Being.

Arg. 3. From the consent of all nations. We never read or heard of any nation so barbarous, who acknowledged not a God. Rather than have no God, they would have a false God. And so many nations could not have been so easily deceived by forged deities, if they had no notion of a real one. Yea †, even the most barbarous nations, that have lived in deserts, most abstracted from human society, free from all traffic and commerce, and without law and government, have had a sense of a Deity. And though there have been irreconcilable enmities, sharp quarrels, and bloody wars, between kingdoms and nations, about other opinions; yet this, of the existence of God, was never the subject of contention.

Now, that which is so universally consented unto by all nations, must needs be a dictate of nature, and consequently a certain truth ‡. For such a consent could not be the effect of mere tradition, which leaves men in great uncertainty, and never strikes deep upon their minds; nor the effect

† *Nulla gens est tam fera & immansueta, quæ non, etiamsi ignoret qualem Deum habere deceat, tamen, habendum sciat.* Cic. L. 1 de Legib.

Nulla gens usquam est adeo contra leges moresque projecta ut non aliquos Deos credat. Seneca Ep.

‡ *Omnibus innatum, & quasi insculptum est, esse Deos.* Cic. de nat. Deor.

fect of a mutual intelligence between governors; to keep the people in awe, as atheists pretend, seeing such an intelligence, whether by a joint assembly, or by a mutual correspondence, is utterly unaccountable.

✓ *Arg. 4.* From conscience. The very Heathens had a conscience, which did *sometimes accuse, and sometimes excuse* them (*m*). It is very plain, that there is in men something that will check and chide them for sin; yea, for secret sins, and such are beyond the cognizance and vengeance of men. Yea, fears and terrors of conscience, in sinners, have sometimes arisen to that height, that they would have reckoned it a favour to be put to death by men; yea, have sometimes laid violent hands upon themselves †. And such checks and terrors of conscience are to be found even in the stoutest sinners, and in men in high place and power in the world; yea, in direct atheists; so that no human art or endeavour could totally free them from these terrors ‡. Some men do what they can to smother their fears, while they wallow in sin, and spend their days in carnal mirth: Yet there are hidden fears which they cannot altogether extinguish; and these hidden fears are revived, whether they will or not, when the hand of God is upon them, or when they are alone, or when they are on the confines of eternity. Certainly these things prove the being of God: For they must needs arise from the secret sense of some Supreme Being, who knows and observes, and will call sinners to an account. So that God hath not left himself without a witness in mens' own breasts: Yea, every man's conscience is as a thousand witnesses of the being of God.

Arg. 5. From experience: Such as the accomplishment of prophecies, and the prediction of things hundreds of years before they came to pass. Cyrus was foretold by name an hundred years before he was born, and Josiah about three hundred years before he was born (*n*). And the casting off of the Jews, and calling of the Gentiles, were foretold many hundreds of years before they were accomplished. Now, that

† *Si honesta sunt quæ facis, omnes sciant: Si turpia, quid refert neminem scire, cupi tu scias: O, te miserum si contempnis hunc testem* Sen. Ep.

‡ *Prima & maxima peccantium pena est peccasse:—secunda, pena premunt & sequuntur, timere semper & expavescere & securitati diffidere.* Thrasylus in Epist. Periand. ex Laertio.

(*m*) Rom. ii. 15.

(*n*) 1 Kings xiii. 2.

that Power which foretels things purely contingent, and which cannot be known by natural signs, or in their causes, and orders all causes for the accomplishment of them, must needs be an infinite Power. Hence is that challenge, *Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods (o)*. God himself produceth this as an incontestible proof of his Deity: *I am God, and there is none like me: declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet come, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure (p)*.

Another experience that proves the being of God, is the restraint that is upon devils and evil spirits. That there are such, is apparent from blasphemous injections, and the practices of witches and conjurors. Now, such is their power that they are able to destroy all mankind in a little time; and such is their nature, that they want not will to do it: Therefore, that it is not done, can be ascribed to no other cause, but a higher power that restrains and over-rules them. God suffers them now and then to discover and vent their malice, that we may know by whose goodness we all subsist.

Another experience is the power of the word of God, in breaking in upon the hearts and consciences of men (q). To which we may add, the gracious experiences of believers, in God's hearing their prayers; relieving, supporting, quickening and refreshing their souls; healing their spiritual diseases and distempers; and many other gracious experiences, whereby believers do sensibly feel *that God is*.

Arg. 6. From those vast and boundless desires that are in the soul of man after some satisfying good. *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good (r)?* There are in the soul insatiable desires after happiness, contentment, and satisfaction, which it cannot find in worldly things; for it finds an imperfection in all things here, and is therefore, in the greatest affluence of worldly comforts and enjoyments, still pursuing after something else to content and satisfy it, and can never be at rest. Now, these desires argue that there is in the soul some notion of a perfect Being, that can content and satisfy it. And indeed, if there were no such Being, the noblest creature in the world would be most miserable. For other creatures obtain their ultimate desires; *they are filled with good (s)*: therefore, if there were nothing able to

(o) Isa. xli. 23. (p) Isa. xlii. 9, 10. (q) 1 Cor. xiv. 25.
(r) Psal. iv. 6, (s) Psal. civ. 28.

to satisfy the vast desires of the soul, man would be in a worse condition than any other creature. Seeing the soul cannot rest but in that which is infinite, there must be something infinite for it to rest in.

Arg 7. From the holy scriptures. The argument is, There is such a book as the holy scriptures; therefore there must be a God. I take this to be a very strong argument. If there were no God, this book of the holy scriptures could never have had a being, seeing no creature nor company of creatures could be the author of it. The holy scripture bears a clear stamp and impress of God upon it; and hath in it such lively marks and characters of a Deity, as are not to be found in all the works of nature. And, to speak with our Confession of Faith, *The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the stile, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments, whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God* †. These are plain arguments of the divine descent and original of the holy scriptures, and that there is an infinitely wise and holy God from whom they proceed.

Fifthly, I come, in the last place, to make application of this doctrine.

Use 1. To confute and reprove all atheists, who either deny the being of God, or wish there were no God, or live as if there were none. So that there are three sorts of atheists,

1. Atheists in opinion.
2. Atheists in affection.
3. Atheists in life and conversation.

And because of the great growth of atheism in the generation wherein we live, I shall speak a little upon each of these.

First, There are atheists in opinion. And those again are of two sorts: There are direct and indirect atheists.

1. Indirect atheists are they who ascribe such things to God, or deny such things of him, whence by consequence his very being is denied. As, 1. When men deny his providence or care of human affairs, bounding him in the heavens. 2. When men deny any of the glorious perfections of his nature; as his omniscience, justice, mercy, holiness,

holiness, or any other of his attributes. Now, such as deny God's providence, do in effect deny his being, seeing they strip him of that wisdom, goodness, mercy, justice and righteousness, which are the glory of his Deity. And he that denies any of his essential attributes, may be said to deny his being, because he cannot be conceived without them. To deny the justice or holiness of God, is virtually to undeify him; seeing he could not be God, if he were not a just and holy God.

2. There are direct atheists, who do plainly and directly deny the divine Being. This is absolute atheism. Some think it possible that there may be some atheists in opinion for a time, though very few. But I humbly conceive that there are none directly and purely so, who do constantly believe that there is no God: Yea, that none, at any time, can be certainly and firmly persuaded in their own minds that there is no God.

Indeed, some few have professed atheism, and openly denied the being of God with their mouths. But such spoke what they wished, rather than what they thought and firmly believed. Hence it is, as a noble author observes*, "that none deny there is a God, but those for whom it maketh that there were no God." And though men may smother in themselves the notices of a Deity, and tamper with their own hearts, to bring them to such a persuasion, that there is no God; and endeavour to persuade others of the same: Yet I verily believe that † the greatest absolute atheists that ever were, could never bring their hearts to a settled firm belief and persuasion, that there is no God; but were, at least sometimes, under the convictions of a Deity: For it is impossible for men utterly to deface and blot out these impressions and characters of God that are naturally engraven upon their hearts. They may as soon despoil themselves of their own humanity, as they can stifle all sentiments of the being of God. Even they that dare to deny a God with their lips, do yet set up something or other as a God in their hearts.

But, though these things be true, yet there are two sorts of speculative atheists in the world; and oh, that there were not too many in the generation wherein we live.

(1.) Some

* Bacon's Essays.

† *Mentiuntur qui dicunt se non sentire esse Deum; nam etsi tibi affirmant interdum, noctu tamen & sibi dubitant.* Sen.

(1.) Some are atheists by studious and earnest endeavour: They labour what they can to blot out of their minds the impressions of the being of a Deity. and to make themselves believe there is no God. They do even study atheism. Though they cannot utterly raze out the notions of a God in their minds; yet they make it their work and business so to do. And in this they have a cursed success: For the sense of God wears off their hearts in a great measure; and, in the just judgment of God, the impressions of his being are much defaced.

But what is it that moves wicked men to this? I answer, love to carnal liberty and licentiousness: For having given up themselves to the satisfying of their base and brutish lusts, they would gladly persuade themselves that there is no God, that they might commit all manner of sin and wickedness with an uncontrollable liberty. They would gladly believe that there is no God, that they might not be men, but beasts; and labour to reconcile their principles with their practices, that they may enjoy their lusts without disturbance. And, alas, these dregs of time in which our lot is fallen, afford us many of these monsters.

(2.) Others are atheists by profession. They do plainly profess atheism, and deny the being of God. Oh, how sad and lamentable is it that this sacred truth, consented unto by all nations, and which is the bond of human societies, and the source of all order in the world, should be denied by some with a bare face, and disputed against in companies, even in reformed churches! And that, under such a clear gospel light, there should be found such monsters in human nature, who utter such horrid discourses in their private cabals, concerning the ever blessed God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and concerning the devil, and heaven and hell, that the very report of them might make your hair to stand, and your hearts to tremble. And may we not take occasion from this to admire the patience of God, in bearing with such vile wretches; and that the earth doth not open her mouth and swallow them up quick. But their judgment *lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not* (t).

I shall, in a few particulars, hold forth the great evil of this atheism, whether by studious and earnest endeavour, or by profession. 1. It is most irrational. It is great folly. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God* (u). It is contrary

(t) 2 Pet. ii. 3.

(u) Psal. xiv. 1.

trary to the stream of universal reason in the world * ; contrary to the rational dictates of the atheist's own soul ; and contrary to the testimony of every creature. The atheist hath as many arguments against him as there are creatures in heaven and earth. 2. It is most impious. What horrid impiety is it for men to envy their Creator a being, without whose goodness they could have had none themselves ? Yea, it is a killing of God, as much as in them lies : It is an aim at the destruction of his being. The atheist says, upon the matter, that God is unworthy of a being, and that it were well the world were rid of him. 3. Atheists are worse than heathens : For, they worshipped many Gods, these none : They preserved some notion of God in the world, but these would banish him both from heaven and earth : They degraded him, these would destroy him. 4. Atheists are worse than devils : For, the devils are under the dread of this truth, that God is ; *they believe and tremble* (*). They cannot be atheists in opinion ; for they feel there is a God, being under the sense of his wrath tormenting them. There may be atheists in the church : but there are none in hell : Atheism hath no footing there. 5. Atheism is certainly a most dangerous evil beyond all contradiction. The atheist, who denies the being of God, or seeks to raze all notions of a Deity out of his mind, what can he gain by this but a sordid pleasure, unworthy of the nature of a man ? And suppose there were no God, what can he lose but his fleshly lusts, by firmly believing that there is one ? There may be a God, for ought the atheist knoweth ; and if there be, what a doleful meeting will there be between God and him ? By believing and confessing a God, a man ventures no loss ; but by denying him, he runs the most desperate hazard, if there be one. 6. Atheism exposeth a man to the most heavy wrath and vengeance of God. What hot receptacles in hell must be reserved for such enemies of God, as strike and fight against his very being ? Yea, such lie open to dreadful wrath here in this world. No atheist almost can be named in any history, that came not to some fearful and

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I

untimely

* *Hec est summa delicti, nolle agnoscere quem ignorare non possit.* Cyp. de idol. Van.

I had rather believe all the fables of the Legend, the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind. *Bacon's Essay*, 16.

(*) James ii. 19.

untimely end. Atheism tends to the overturning of human society, by taking off the bridle from the sinful inclinations of men: And sins destructive of human society are remarkably followed with vengeance. It is a bold sin, and point-blank against all the glory of God: And boldness in sin is a presage of vengeance, especially when the glory of God is more particularly concerned in it.

I shall now apply myself to the honourable magistrates of the city*. This atheism of which I have been speaking, though it be not openly avowed and professed, yet, alas, it abounds very much in this generation and city wherein we live. A secret atheism lies at the root of all these wicked practices that abound among us. Practical atheism doth always spring from an evil disposition of heart toward God (y). Though you cannot root out the atheism that is in the hearts of men: Yet the outbreakings thereof in mens life and practice, by bare-faced debauchery, scoffing at religion, and other horrid impieties; these you are called of God to curb and restrain, by a vigorous and impartial exercise of that power and authority wherewith God hath invested you. This city was for some time pestered with a set of people that pretended to a spirit of prophecy and immediate inspiration. But I verily believe, and I hope you are under the conviction of it, that their pretences and practices had a manifest tendency to shake people loose in their belief of all divine truths revealed in the holy scriptures, and to open a door for absolute atheism and infidelity. You have shewed your commendable zeal in ridding the city of these people; and it is hoped, that after this, they shall find no entertainment in it. There are also divers places in this city, where innovations in the public worship of God are set up, contrary to the word of God and the constant practice of this church; and contrary to the good and laudable laws, made since the happy revolution, for establishing and securing this church in her worship, as well as in her doctrine, discipline, and government. And as it were easy to clear, if time would permit, that the patching up the worship of God with the inventions of men, is practical atheism; so the endeavours used
by

* This sermon was preached before the Honourable Magistrates and Council of Edinburgh, in the Tron-Church, when they were going their circuit through the churches of the city, before the annual election.

(y) Psal. xiv. 1.

by some to introduce the English liturgy, hath a manifest tendency to the disturbance of the peace and quiet of church and state. Therefore it concerns you, from a regard to the glory of God, the welfare of this church, and the peace and quiet of the city, to give yet further proofs of your zeal, in proper ways and methods, against such innovations.

I shall conclude with a few advices with respect to the atheism, profaneness, irreligion and impiety that abound among us. 1. Labour to get your own souls suitably affected with grief for the dishonour done to the blessed God by these evils. The grief of Ezra and Nehemiah made them forward to reform the corruptions that were among the people. You cannot be truly zealous for reforming these evils that are not burdensome to your own souls. 2. While any of you are in the government, study holy magnanimity and courage for God. Being to oppose reigning vice, you need to be men of heroic spirits. Be earnest with God for a spirit of zeal against the atheism and daring profaneness that abound. You are God's vicegerents, and are called gods; God hath set his own name upon you; Therefore the glory and honour of God should be dear to you above all things in the world. In such a degenerate and dissolute age, you need to rouse up yourselves to act vigorously for God, and to render yourselves a terror to evil-doers. 3. Encourage a gospel ministry. If the interest of religion should sink among us, other interests are like to sink with it; And how should the interest of religion prosper, if a gospel ministry be not supported and encouraged. I hope, none of you will look on a gospel ministry as a burden on the city: And it is earnestly desired and expected, both by ministers, and by the Lord's people, that in a time when there is so great need, no unnecessary delay will be made of providing the city with more ministers, able ministers of the New Testament; and that, in your wisdom and zeal for God, you will use all proper means for removing all obstructions to it out of the way, and which I hope the Lord will direct you unto. 4. Now, when you are to chuse magistrates for the ensuing year, see that you chuse men duly qualified. Have a regard to the scripture-qualifications of good magistrates. See that they be *able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness* (z); and men of courage, resolution and constancy of mind, who may set themselves stedfastly against a flood of atheism and irreligion. But being hopeful that you will do
even

(z) Exod. xviii. 21.

even more than I say, I shall add no more, but recommend you to the grace of God.

S E R M O N VII.

Second, **T**HERE are atheists in affection; or in wish and desire. Many that believe there is a God, do yet secretly wish that there were none. They may have atheistical hearts, who have not atheistical heads. Some take this to be the meaning of that text, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God* (a). He hath said it in his heart. That is, he desires and wishes there were no God: For the heart is the seat of desires. They are the fool's wishes and desires, rather than his formal and explicit thoughts *. Such desires and wishes do often lurk under secret imaginations, when men please themselves with such imaginations and suppositions as these, O that there were no God, none to call men to an account; then they might let loose the reins, and live as they list. Mens thoughts and desires do naturally run that way.

But it may be objected, Is not God infinitely good and amiable? How then is it possible for men to wish him not to have a being? I answer, None can heartily wish the destruction of God, or the cessation of his being, considered as he is God; because he is indeed the best of Beings, the most lovely Being, yea, infinitely and universally good and amiable. But wicked men consider God as clothed with such perfections, which they apprehend as hurtful to them; such as infinite justice and holiness: And so wish he were stript of these perfections; and in so doing they do, by necessary consequence, wish he were deprived of his being, because he cannot be without them; they are so essential to his nature, that he would not be God, if he were not just and holy.

But what may be the causes of this atheism in affection? I assign these few. 1. A strong inclination to impiety and debauchery. Profane and irreligious men think, if there were no God, O then they would be freed of all these restraints, and melancholy and sad thoughts, which religion imposeth upon them. Many are so deeply in love with sin and de-

(a) Psal. xiv. 1.

* He rather saith it by rote to himself, as that he would have, than that he can thoroughly believe it, or be persuaded of it.

Bacon's Essays.

debauchery, that they would rather have God not to be, than they themselves to be under controul. That is the language of wicked sinners, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways* (b). 2. Fears and terrors of conscience in wicked sinners. Guilt always begets fear, and fear begets hatred, and hatred strikes at the very being of the object hated. A guilty conscience considers God as *a God to whom vengeance belongeth*: And as a malefactor guilty of death wisheth there were no judge to order his punishment; so awakened sinners wish there were no God, to take vengeance†. A wicked man, under horrors and terrors of conscience, would take away the very life and being of God, if it were in his power. 3. Averseness to duties that slavish fear urgeth men unto. Many look on the duties of God's worship, and go about them, as mere drudgeries. They are utterly averse to them, and yet are constrained to the practice of them by a fear of hell and wrath. And when men perform duties with such reluctancy, no wonder if they have an evil disposition of heart towards God who enjoins them. Sinners look upon God as a hard master, as cruel and tyrannical: And they that look on their superiors as tyrannical, will be very little concerned in their welfare. The apprehensions of the severity of the divine commands do always spring up in desires and wishes that there were no God to command.

Now, this atheism in affection is natural to us. As I said before, mens thoughts and desires do naturally run this way. Therefore look into your own hearts, and try yourselves impartially. Hath there not been sometimes such secret thoughts and imaginations, O if there were no God, none to take notice of sin, or to take vengeance for it? Do you never please yourselves with such thoughts, what liberty you would take to sin, if there were no God? Did you never wish to be subject to no law, but that of your own will? Did you never wish to be your own lord, to have none above you to control you, or to call you to an account, that you might live and wallow in sin without fear? I am persuaded that upon serious and impartial search and inquiry, you will find ground to charge yourselves with much of this atheism in affection.

This kind of atheism is a woful evil, upon these following accounts. 1. Such atheistical desires and wishes are an argument of great enmity in your heart against God. What greater

Job xxi. 14.

† *Nemo Deum non esse credit, nisi cui Deum non esse expedit.*

greater hatred of God and enmity against him, than to wish the destruction of his very being? This indeed is the very *spirit of enmity*. 2. Such atheistical desires and wishes are all known to God. Though they are hid from men, yet they lie *naked and open* to his view, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who *searches and tries the heart and reins*. Therefore the Spirit of God takes notice of this atheism; *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God* (c). Our secret wishes are as visible to God, as our outward actions are to one another. 3. God will certainly call men to an account for this atheism. On that day, when we shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, all our desires and wishes will come into an account and reckoning; much more these that are atheistical. And on that day, men must expect a measure of wrath proportionable to the wickedness of their hearts.

Third, There are atheists in life and conversation. These are they that live as if there were no God, and regard him as little as if he had no being. Such atheists are most plenty, even under the light of the gospel. There are few atheists in opinion or profession, more in affection, and most all in life and conversation. Such are all wicked and ungodly men, who in their judgments own God, but *in their works deny him* (d). Many own God in profession, but deny him in conversation. They live down this principle, *that God is*. There is a real language in mens conversation. Works discover what is in the heart, better than words; They shew what secret principles lurk there, though they be not expressly owned. An atheistical life doth best discover what atheism is in the heart.

Now this practical atheism is most agreeable to corrupt nature. The heart is naturally full of it, and void of the least spark of the practical sense of a Deity. And being so agreeable to corrupt nature, hence it is that it is so common. There are swarms of practical atheists in the generation wherein we live. When men profess there is a God, and yet do not seek peace with him, but live in heart enmity against him, and are careless whether he be pleased or displeased; what is this but practical atheism? They that profess to believe that he is an omniscient and holy God, and yet give up themselves to a course of sin, living in filthiness, or taking liberty to lie, or cheat, or oppress, or drink drunk, or profane the Lord's Day; such are practical

(c) Psal. xiv. 1.

(d) Tit. ii. 16.

cal atheists: And oh, how many such are there in the city wherein we live.

I shall give instance particularly in several practices whereby men live down this principle, *that God is*, and which are consequently to be reckoned under this head of practical atheism, as parts or branches thereof. As,

1. A profane neglect of the worship of God. The Spirit of God lays this brat of irreligion at the door of atheism, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God (e)*. And then it follows, he doth *not seek God*. Many of you live in a profane neglect of secret and family worship, and many are guilty of a profane withdrawment from public worship. Now, though you believe there is a God, yet your neglect of his worship is a practical denial of him; for it is only by the worship of God that we acknowledge his Deity. Certainly there is a secret atheism at the root, when you dare deny God these parts of natural worship, that even such as knew him least did give unto him. Such as do not worship God, wduld wish there were no God to worship.

2. Hypocrisy. Many of you please yourselves with external duties, and fair shews and appearances of devotion, when your heart is not right with God. This is a practical denial of God's omniscience, as if he could not pierce into the darkness of your mind, but did as little know you as you do one another; as if God could be imposed upon by fawning pretences. Atheism is always at the bottom of hypocrisy. Many of you never think of the all-seeing eye of God; therefore, so long as you can blind the eyes of men, you think all is well enough. To carry fair without, when the heart is not right within, is to deny God to be the searcher of hearts. Hypocrites are the greatest practical atheists in the world.

3. Indulgence to secret sins. Many of you are not ashamed to do that in secret which you would blush to do before men. There is a secret atheism at the root of this; for the language of it is, *God seeth not*. Therefore secret sinners are brought in encouraging themselves in their wickedness, saying, *No eye shall see me (f)*. Hence the Lord says, *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him (g)?* Implying, that some flatter themselves with such thoughts, as if they could hide themselves from the eye of God.

4. Corrupting

(e) Psal. xiv. 1, 2. (f) Job xxiv. 15. (g) Jer. xxiii. 24.

4. Corrupting the worship of God with a mixture of human inventions. It is matter of sad regret, that in a protestant church, such rites and ceremonies as are merely of human invention and institution, are used as parts of worship, and have a religious necessity imposed upon them. But seeing men are naturally prone to live by sense, it needs seem no wonder, if a sensible worship, that affects the outward senses with a kind of amazement, be so dear to them, when spiritual worship is most loathsome. Carnal men nauseate the simplicity of divine worship, as unworthy of the majesty and excellency of God; and pompous rites and ceremonies are the engine of the devil to bring men to this. The ordinances of God are busked with a new and gaudy dress, to take the eye with a vain shew. And is it not very strange, that a set of men among us, who when they had power and authority in their hands, never once attempted the introduction of the English Liturgy, should attempt it now, contrary to plain law? Is there not just occasion given hereby to suspect, that what they do now in this matter, is not out of conscience, but from a factious spirit, and disaffection to the present government, and to disturb the peace and quiet of church and state? Now, I say, the corrupting the worship of God by such human inventions is a branch of practical atheism: For, it is a practical denial of the infinite wisdom of God, as if he needed the wit and device of man to contrive a fit model of worship for his honour. When men will make additions of their own to God's institutions, they esteem themselves wiser than God, and give out that they can invent ways and means of worship suitable to God's honour, better than he can do himself. And seeing it is the prerogative of God alone to give laws to the conscience, and to institute and appoint his own worship: Therefore, for men to impose human inventions in the worship of God, upon their own or other mens consciences, is a bold ascent into the throne of God, and hath been deservedly accounted the very spirit of antichrist.

5. Sensuality and luxury. When men spend their time in feasting and sporting, carding and dicing, balling and dancing; and give up themselves to carnal and sinful pleasures, and sensual delights, drunkenness, and gluttony and filthiness: This is a plain practical denial of the being of God. Certainly, the impressions of God upon the hearts of such men must be exceedingly defaced and worn out, else they could not take such liberty, and keep all quiet in
their

their souls. If at any time conscience begins to murmur, carnal men relieve their melancholy thoughts with their company and cups, and so by degrees wear out the feelings of conscience, and do almost lose all sense of God upon their hearts.

6. Scoffing at religion. Profane men will be venting the superfluities of their frothy wit, by jeering at sermons, mocking religion, and jesting with the holy scriptures. They make these things as sauce to their meals, and entertainment at their drunken cups. As this springs from atheism, so it is a cause of more: For, hereby they blot out all reverence of God, and deface these impressions of his being that are naturally engraven upon their hearts. Hence it is, that men of a vicious life and frothy wit, are men of a fit temper for the devil to make atheists of.

7. Consulting witches and such as have a familiar spirit. Some, when they would know what events shall befall them, or how they may recover what they have lost or hath been stolen from them, run to wizards, soothsayers, and such as have a familiar spirit. But what is this, but to deny the God that is above? When king Ahaziah sent to Baalzebub, to know if he should recover from his sickness, he had that dreadful message sent to him, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, thou shalt not come down, &c. (b).* So, is it not because there is not a God in heaven, that many go to the devil and his wicked instruments in such cases?

But it may be enquired, Whence is it that practical atheism doth so much abound, even where the gospel is purely preached? I answer, Because God, in his just judgment, gives up many to it, for their abuse and contempt of the glorious gospel, and rebelling against the light thereof. Hence it is that there are worse atheists to be found under the clear light of the gospel, than in the darkest corners of the earth; worse atheists among professed protestants, than among pagans and Indians; as weeds grow rankest in the richest grounds. There are no such atheists as these who have their eyes put out by gospel light. This judiciary atheism is most incurable.

It remains that I hold forth to you the great evil of this practical atheism, which I shall endeavour to do in a few particulars.

1. It is a clear discovery of that hidden atheism that lieth
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(b) 2 Kings i. 3.

in the hearts of men. Actions are a greater discovery of a principle than words; and the frame of mens hearts is to be measured, rather by what they do, than by what they say. The truth is, a secret atheism lieth at the root of all sin. When men take liberty to do what they please, this is the language of it, I would be a lord to myself, and have none above me. A sense of God in the heart would burst out in the life: Therefore when men take liberty to live as they list, certainly the sense of God's being upon their hearts is much defaced. Hence it is, that all outward impieties are branches of a root of atheism in our nature. And, O what atheism must there be in the hearts of men, when so much is visible in their lives?

2. Practical atheism is, in some respect, worse than atheism in profession, abstractly considered. They are more deservedly accounted atheists, who believe there is a God, and yet live as if there was none; than they who deny a God, and yet live outwardly as if there was one, if any such are to be found. Certain it is, that a practical denial of God, is worse than a mere verbal one: For, deeds are usually more deliberate than words; and words may be the fruit of a passion, but a course of evil actions is always the fruit of a principle settled in the heart.

3. Practical atheists are easily carried into atheism in opinion. Such as live as if there were no God, and in their works deny him, would gladly believe that there is none, and are easily induced to deny his being. Is it any wonder if the devil go far on in persuading them that there is no God, who do already live in such defiance against him, as cannot but render the belief of a God dreadful and terrible to their thoughts?

4. Practical atheism, in the lives of professed Christians, is a great stumbling-block to others. We read in history, that when a heathen surpris'd a Christian in an act of filthiness, he put home this smart question to him, *O Christian, Christian, where is thy God?* When you who are professors, and talk much of God and religion, do not live up to the power of it, but live and walk contrary to your profession; you live down this principle, *that God is*, and would make others believe that there is no God at all. There is no greater temptation to atheism than the scandalous lives of professors. And oh, is it not most lamentable, that you, who should bring God into request with others, do, by your scandalous practices, make others suspect whether there be a God or not?

5. It is a base and unworthy behaviour toward God. To believe a God, and yet live as if there were none; to pay no regard to him, O what a contempt of God is this? As if he were unworthy of your notice; yea, unworthy of a being. And this is the more base, considering the ingratitude that is in it: For, you are the work of his hands; he made you, and not you yourselves; and he daily loadeth you with benefits; all the mercies and blessings you receive and enjoy, come originally from his hand: O then, how base is it to rebel against him, to pour contempt upon him, and to count nothing of him, as all practical atheists do? We abhor the unworthy carriage of a man toward his earthly benefactors: And is God a Being less to be regarded than man, and more worthy of contempt than a poor creature.

6. Your belief of God's being is that which aggravates your impiety. Believe it, Sirs, this will put the most dreadful accent, and the most killing aggravation on your sins, that believing there is a God, you dare presume to rebel against him, and to provoke the Almighty to jealousy, as if you thought to be stronger than he. It is indeed the greatest prodigy in the world, to believe there is a God, and yet live as if there were none. This will render you inexcusable in that great day.

S E R M O N VIII.

Use 2. **F**OR exhortation. In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Labour to be firmly settled in this truth, *that God is*. Charge this truth home upon your hearts, and study to be well rooted in this principle. I shall here,

1. Propose a few things by way of motive to engage you to this.

2. Give some directions what to do that you may be well rooted and grounded in the belief of this supreme truth.

First, To excite and engage you to make it your business to be through grace firmly rooted and well settled in this principle, *That God is*, I propose these motives.

Mot. 1. There is great danger of being drawn into atheism. For,

1. Satan will vigorously assault you. He will be busy to shake and weaken your faith in this supreme truth, *that God is*. For, although in former ages Satan was willing to keep up the notions of a God in the world, for promoting his grand design of erecting idolatry: Yet now, seeing his de-

sign

sign in that matter is in a great measure defeated in many nations, he may endeavour, as his last refuge, to banish the notions of a God out of the world. And I think that hence it is that barefaced atheism doth so much abound in these last times; because in these last ages Satan's grand design and business is to raze out all sense of God in the minds of men. Even the best among you need be at pains to be well settled in the truth of God's being; because you know not how soon Satan may use his utmost efforts, to bring you to a denial of this supreme truth.

2. There were never more temptations to atheism than there are now. The great variety of opinions in matters of religion, hath a great tendency to atheism. The many gross errors that abound, do in less or more shake this supreme truth about the existence of God. The many divisions, factions, and parties that are in the church, tend to breed atheism in the world. The scandalous lives of many professors who pretend to strictness in religion, tempt others to think, that religion is nothing but an empty pretence, and a covert for sinful practices. And the endeavours that are used to draw people away to the expectation of new revelations, are the device of Satan, to cheat people out of their religion; and so tend to atheism. And I add, that in this degenerate age, atheism appears barefaced without disguise; Therefore we should never be without our armour. Certainly, in a season when we are so much assaulted with temptations, there is great need to stand our ground, and to fortify ourselves against atheism.

3. The danger is yet the greater, considering that there is a secret atheism in the hearts of the best men. Even your own corrupt hearts will be ever casting up atheistical thoughts. Therefore it is good to stand upon your guard, and in defiance of such thoughts, to settle your belief of this supreme truth, *that God is.*

Mot. 2. The firm settling of this truth is of the greatest influence in religion. As fire, when it is once well kindled, doth of its own accord burst out into a flame: So, when we are once well settled under the power and dominion of this truth, *that God is,* the whole business of religion will become the more easy. Therefore the Jews call the knowledge of the being of God, *The foundation and pillar of wisdom.* Religion in the heart rises or falls, according to the strength or weakness of our faith in this principle. Particularly, to be well rooted in this principle, *that God is,* is of great influence, 1. In matters of faith. All secondary truths depend on the first

first principles. Other truths shall be the more easily believed, when you are firmly settled in this truth : But while you waver in this principle, you will always be troubled with doubts about other truths that God hath revealed. 2. In matters of practice. Unless we firmly believe there is a God, we can pay him no religious regard, no steady worship : And without this, we cannot order our lives as it becomes us. All exorbitances of life, all unevenness in our walk, all our irreverence in worship, all our dulness and wanderings of heart, and vanity and carelessness of mind in our religious duties, do spring from an unsettledness in this principle, *that God is*. But when this principle is once firmly settled, it will have a mighty influence to persuade to serious religion, and to engage us to fear and serve God, and to be awful and serious in our worship.

Mot. 3. To be well rooted in this principle, *that God is*, will be of great use in all the difficulties of our lives. It is a comfort to the oppressed, that there is a God, to be a refuge for them, and to notice their sorrows, and right their wrongs. This is proposed by the preacher, as a ground of comfort to the afflicted ; *If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter : For he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they (a)*. It is a matter of comfort, in the case of wrong, oppression, and injustice in the courts of men, that there is a higher court to which we may appeal. And it is no small comfort to distressed and afflicted believers, that all things are governed, by an infinitely wise, just, and holy God. If we are unsettled in this principle, *that God is*, to whom can we make our complaints in trouble ? And where can we go for support and comfort ? And how should we relieve ourselves with the hopes of a glory to come ? For in a day of trouble, the thoughts of other things may have a bitterness mixed with them, and may greatly augment our sorrows.

Mot. 4. Without the firm settling of this truth, *that God is*, we cannot believe the holy scriptures. Unless we firmly believe *that God is*, how can we believe any revelation from him ? But the more firmly you believe the being of God, his commands, promises, and threatenings, will have the more influence upon you. Most certain it is, that the holy scriptures will be but an useless book to you, and your reading and studying them will be lost labour, if you be not settled in the belief of his being who is the Author of them.

Second,

(a) Eccl. v. 8.

Second, I shall, in the next place, give some directions holding forth what you must do that you may be firmly settled and well rooted in this supreme truth, *that God is*.

Direct. 1. Beware of such opinions as tend to atheism. There being impressions and characters of God engraven upon all his works, and especially upon the hearts of men; therefore Satan doth not directly rise up against this truth, *that God is*; but seeks by little and little to weaken our assent to it, by drawing us to such opinions as strike at the being of God, or aim at the undermining this supreme truth in our hearts: Such as denying the immortality of the soul. This is a stroke at a distance, at the very being of God, who is the supreme Spirit. Again, another opinion is, that it is no great matter what religion a man be of, so he walk according to the principles of it, and be of a sober moral life. This tends to shake people loose of all religion and regard to God. *To make many doors to heaven, as a worthy divine saith*, is to widen the gates of hell.* Another opinion is that I already hinted at, the expectation of new revelations beyond the written word. This is the device of the devil, to keep people from settling in the ways and truths of God; and so tends to atheism. And then, popery hath a great tendency to atheism; partly, because it is a pompous and formal religion, consisting of many idle and ridiculous ceremonies, which tend to beget a secret contempt and scorn of religion in considering men: Partly also, because the errors and heresies of the church of Rome, are calculated for this present world, and for temporal ends; and are supported by forged miracles and lying legends: All which tend to make people question the truth of all religion, and to look on religion as nothing but a draught of human policy.

Direct. 2. Take heed of an indulgence to sin. When you take liberty to sin, you will hate the law that forbids it; and this will lead you to a hatred of the law-giver; and hatred of God strikes against his very being. When you proclaim to yourselves an indulgence to sin, you will be apt to think, O that there were no God, and would gladly persuade yourselves that there is none; and will think it your only game to do what you can to root out the notions of God in your minds, for your own quiet, that you may wallow in sin without remorse †.

Direct. 3.

* Manton on Heb. xi.

† *Dæmones ex hominibus fieri, quidam opinati sunt, perpetua criminum licentia.* Petrarch. de Injusto Domin.

Direct. 3. Prize and study the holy scriptures. This principle, *that God is*, appears every where in scripture; and it is not enough to assent unto this truth, merely upon grounds of reason, but you should assent to it upon grounds of faith. As I said formerly, there are more clear marks and characters of a Deity stamped upon the holy scriptures, than upon all the works of nature. Therefore converse much with them. By this means was Junius converted from atheism. His father perceiving him to be so atheistical, caused lay a Bible in every room, so that into whatsoever room he entered a Bible haunted him: And he fancied that it upbraided him, *Wilt thou not read me, atheist? Wilt thou not read me?* Whereupon he read it, and was thereby converted. I say then, study the holy scriptures: And in doing so, learn to submit your reason to divine revelation; for some men, neglecting the scriptures, and going forth in the pride of their own understandings, have at last disputed themselves into flat atheism.

Direct. 4. Study God in the creatures as well as in the scriptures. The holy scriptures direct us to view God in his works: And indeed you may see him in every thing that he hath made. The creatures were made to be heralds of his glory. In the book of the creatures, he hath written a part of the excellency of his name; and you should learn to read God wherever he hath made himself legible to you. And although the appearances of God are clearer in the holy scripture, than in all the works of nature; yet seeing scripture and nature are not contrary one to another, neither of them ought to be neglected.

Direct. 5. Be much in converse with God, and press after much familiar and experimental acquaintance with him in your own soul. By this means you shall discover the loveliness of his nature, and the sweetness of his ways: And this will confirm you in the belief of a God, and stifle temptations to atheism. You are not like to espouse any opinion, that is confuted by your delightful converse with God. By frequent converse with him, these notions of a Deity that are in your hearts will grow more vigorous and lively.

Direct. 6. Be often viewing and improving your gracious experiences of God. Believers in Christ, have you not often found God, in the strengthening, reviving, and refreshing influences of his grace upon your souls? Have you not had sweet manifestations of his grace, and experiences of his love? Have you not had frequent refreshing tastes of his goodness, in pardoning your iniquities, hearing and answering

ing your prayers, supplying your wants, feeding and feasting your souls, &c.. The reviewing of such experiences is a mighty preservative against atheism. Can you doubt of his being, when you have been so often revived, refreshed, and supported by him? The secret touches of God upon your hearts, your inward converses with him, are to you a clearer evidence of the being of God, than all the works of nature.

Direct. 7. Attentively observe providences. There is a set of men settled on their lees, that say in their hearts, *the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil (b)*. They conceive of God, as if he were shut up within the curtains of heaven, and took no notice of what is done here below. But such atheistical thoughts would vanish, would you turn students of Providence. Upon the observation of remarkable providences, you could not but say, *This is the finger of God; this is the Lord's doing*. If you would observe seasonable mercies bestowed on good men, and remarkable judgments inflicted on wicked men, you could not but cry out, *Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth (c)*. The observation of Providence is a notable cure of, and antidote against atheism.

Direct. 8. Beware of such books as have the seeds of atheism scattered in them. Some men are of a very curious and inquisitive temper, and have a great itch to know what is in this and the other book, how dangerous soever these books may be to their souls. Some indeed may sometimes read such books with profit: And there are some whose place and office doth some way oblige them to read such books; as ministers, that they may be able to give warning to people, and to hold forth to them how dangerous such and such tenets and opinions are. Yet take these two cautions. 1. They that read books which have the seeds of atheism in them, need to be men of sound and solid judgments, that are well rooted and grounded in the faith, and have a spirit of discerning. 2. Such as read them would not make it their ordinary practice; but read them very rarely, and with abhorrence, and an holy diffidence in themselves, and an humble dependence on God through Christ for the conduct of his Spirit who leads unto all truth.

Direct. 9. Take heed of familiar converse with men of atheistical spirits. These seeds of atheism that are in your own hearts, render your familiar converse with such men highly dangerous.

(b) Zeph. i. 11.

(c) Psal. lvi. ult.

dangerous. At first you may have an abhorrence of their atheistical principles and practices; but by frequent and familiar converse with them, this abhorrence will gradually abate. I do the rather warn you against this woful evil, because indeed there is no greater cause of the corruption of youth in this generation, than bad company and converse.

Direct. 10. I recommend sobriety and temperance; the moderate use of lawful comforts. The immoderate and unwary use of allowed comforts proves a great snare to the soul. Job feared, when his sons feasted, that they had *curst God in their hearts* (d). Where are there greater atheists this day than such as indulge themselves in sensual pleasures? Sensuality is a great step to atheism. Nothing is more apt to quench the notions of God in the souls of men.

Direct. 11. Be much in prayer. Pray that God would increase and strengthen your faith; that you may not only assent to this truth, *That God is*, upon principles of reason, but firmly believe it as a point of faith. Faith is not gotten by clearness of judgment, or strength of argument; it is the gift of God: therefore go to God for it.

Direct. 12. Beware of disputing this principle under a temptation. But of this I shall speak afterward.

S E R M O N IX.

Exhort. 2. **S**ET yourselves against all atheistical thoughts and whispers. Sometimes such thoughts arise, in the hearts even of serious Christians, as have a great tendency to atheism; yea, are in their own nature atheistical. There are sometimes some secret whispers of atheism, some surmises in the soul that strike against the being of God. Concerning these I shall shew,

1. *Whence they arise.*
2. *What considerations may be effectual to engage us in a vigorous opposition to them.*
3. *By what means we must oppose them.*

First, Whence atheistical thoughts and whispers arise. 1. Sometimes they arise from Satan. He sometimes troubles the soul with such suggestions as strike directly against the being and glory of God. These are part of his *fiery darts* (a). They fall like a flash of lightening on the soul. Sometimes even believers in Christ are molested with

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such

(d) Job i. 4.

(a) Eph. vi. 16.

such suggestions from him. 2. Sometimes they arise from our own hearts, and these cursed seeds of atheism that are in the best men. We are sometimes apt to think thus with ourselves, *Is there a God? What if there be none? What if religion be but a human device, and the gospel a cunningly devised fable?* God knows how often such thoughts and whispers arise in our hearts. And we must not lay all upon Satan; for corruption in our own hearts ministers matter to such sparks. It is not said, *Satan hath suggested to the fool*; but, *the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God* (b).

But it may be enquired, How shall we know whether these atheistical whispers, that are sometimes in our hearts, be the suggestions of Satan, or thoughts arising from our own corruption? I answer in these two things: 1. It is very hard to distinguish them: For as the suggestions of Satan are usually sudden and surprising, so are the first motions of corruption in our own hearts. Corruption in us is very broody, particularly in atheistical thoughts and imaginations: and believers do oft-times find themselves surprised with such bubblings up of corruption: So that is very hard to discern between the fiery darts of the devil, and sparks from our own corruption. 2. They are very rarely, if ever, separated. Though Satan's temptations and suggestions be not our sins, save only when they are consented unto or complied with; and though his suggestions do not always prevail to a full conquest: yet it is seldom, if ever, that our hearts do not, in less or more, join issue with them. And here we may observe a very great difference between Christ and the best believers. Says our Lord, *The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me* (c). There was not the least corruption in him for Satan's temptations to work upon: But there is a seed of all evil in our hearts. Hence it is that Satan's temptations and suggestions fall on us, not as a fire-ball upon ice or snow, but as sparks upon tinder, or a flash of lightening upon dry thatch. *Where no wood is, says Solomon, there the fire goeth out* (d). If there were no corruption in us, we would be in no such danger: But our corrupt hearts are apt to take fire at Satan's fiery darts.

Therefore I advise you who are serious Christians, when atheistical whispers arise in your hearts, not to spend the time in searching and enquiring, if they be the suggestions of Satan, or thoughts arising from your own corruption.

1. Because,

(b) Psal. xiv. 1. (c) John xiv. 30. (d) Prov. xxvi. 20.

1. Because, granting they be the suggestions of Satan, yet twenty to one but your hearts are tainted or defiled by them, in less or more: So that it is safest to suspect your own hearts and corruption within you. 2. Because the time that would be spent in such a search and inquiry, may be far more profitably employed otherwise. When a house is on fire, we do not spend the time in searching how the fire began, but set speedily to the quenching of it: So, when atheistical whispers arise in your hearts, let them come from what principle soever, it will be your wisdom to set yourselves speedily in opposition to them, and without delay to quench these sparks ere they break out into a flame. And so,

Second, Let me shew you what considerations may be effectual to engage us in a vigorous opposition to atheistical thoughts and suggestions. *Confid.* 1. Such thoughts and suggestions are of a very foul nature. Thoughts that strike at the being of God are of a very dangerous importance: therefore you should not lightly digest them. They tend to a total eclipse of all spiritual light in your soul. *Confid.* 2. Men will be called to an account for them. See how God hath provided for the safety and majesty of princes. *Curse not the king, no not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter (e).* Even disloyal thoughts against magistrates are liable to God's judgment, much more atheistical thoughts, that strike against the being of the supreme Majesty. *Confid.* 3. The harbouring of such thoughts is very dangerous: for Satan keeps a secret intelligence with the thoughts; they set open the gates of the soul for him; and, when they prepare the tinder, the next fiery dart may set all on a flame. The harbouring of them will hearten your enemy, so that these motions will grow the more vigorous. *Confid.* 4. When you oppose them heartily, they will not be laid to your charge, but set on the devil's score; at least God will pardon your infirmity and weakness. Suppose these atheistical thoughts may be thoughts arising from your own corruption; yet, if you be deeply humbled for them, if you protest against them, and cry out with the forced woman under the law; if you set yourselves to suppress them, then God will not charge them against you. These things argue the sincerity and uprightness of your heart: and God will accept of your sincerity, and pardon failings for Christ's sake.

Third,

(e) Eccl. x. 20.

Third, I proceed to shew by what means you are called to oppose such atheistical thoughts and whispers. Take this in these directions.

Direct. 1. See that you do not close with them, nor nourish them in your hearts. If they be forced in upon you, yet do not harbour them; give them no credit, but regard them as the hissings of the old serpent. Receive them as a flash of lightening in your face, and shut your eyes against them.

Direct. 2. Be humbled for them. Atheistical thoughts and surmises are of so foul a nature, that they should not be passed over without humiliation. How was the psalmist grieved because of his foolish imaginations of God. *Thus my heart was grieved, says he, and I was pricked in my reins.* And he cries out against himself as a fool and a beast for his unworthy thoughts of God. *So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee (f).* So do you: "Oh, shall I think or once imagine that there is no God? What a brutish thing is this? Common sense and reason may teach me otherwise." Upon every assault from Satan or your own corruption, pour out tears unto God. When such thoughts rush into your mind, cry out, Oh what a vile heart have I! and aggravate this sin, and make it odious to your soul. Frequent humiliations will deaden the fire within, and make the sparks the fewer. The more you are humbled for such atheistical thoughts, the more will your hatred of them be increased, and consequently you will be the more prepared to repel them.

Direct. 3. Suppress such atheistical thoughts and whispers, and keep them under. And, 1. Check them at their very first appearance. Though you cannot hinder them from haunting you, yet let them not lodge in you. Quench them speedily, as you would do sparks of fire among flax. Entertain them with no less indignation than Christ did Peter's carnal counsel, *Get thee behind me, Satan.* Spit out the devil's poison with detestation. Oppose the whole scheme of nature to such thoughts. Stir up sentiments of conscience against sentiments of corruption: And resolve sooner to believe that yourselves are not, than that God is not. 2. I recommend to you the shield of faith. *Above all, says the apostle, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (g).* Employ Christ much. And act faith on him particularly as tempted: *For*

in

(f) Psal. lxxiii. 21, 22. (g) Eph. vi. 16.

in that he himself suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (b). Even Christ himself was tempted to a practical denial of God by worshipping the devil; but he came off a conqueror in the day of his trial. And all this was not merely upon his own account, but for his people's sake; so that the benefit of his victory and conquest redounds to them. Therefore, in the faith of all this, have recourse to a tempted Saviour: look to him, and rely upon him for help and succour. 3. Be much in prayer. Consider your own weakness, and pray for powerful assistance. As atheistical thoughts and suggestions solicit you, be you as frequent in soliciting God; and then, as the devil takes their part, so Christ will take yours. Right prayer calls in that seasonable help and relief that is laid up in Christ for us. *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (i).* 4. Persevere in your resistance, and be very importunate. Though atheistical thoughts and suggestions importune you, yet do not lay down your spiritual armour. You increase your enemy's courage by your cowardice: but an obstinate resistance makes him fly. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (k).*

Direct. 4. Improve such atheistical thoughts and suggestions. Like the skilful pilot, make use of the violence of these winds, and the raging of this sea, to further you in your spiritual voyage. Even poison itself may be made medicinal. You may strike some sparks from the most hellish motions, to kindle your love to God, and quicken your repentance. Improve atheistical thoughts and suggestions to increase your hatred of them. They give you just occasion to awe your heart into a more deep reverence of the majesty of God. This is to beat the devil and your own corrupt hearts with their own weapons.

Exhort. 3. Is it so that it is the first principle of faith, to believe *that God is*? This directs us what to do under strong and violent temptations, viz. Not to dispute this principle, but resolutely and stedfastly believe it.

As I hinted already, even believers in Christ are sometimes strongly assaulted with temptations to atheism. And there are several seasons that Satan improves for this end; as, when the godly are in great affliction and distress; when their prayers are not heard and answered; and when grievous wrongs and oppressions go unrevenge. In such cases,
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(b) Heb. ii. 18. (i) Heb. iv. 16. (k) James iv. 7.

the children of God are often tempted to question, if there be a God. Indeed the devil himself cannot turn atheist, much less can he make the child of God one: Yet the children of God may be sore haunted and disquieted with temptations to it. They may meet with atheistical suggestions one upon the back of another: these fiery darts may flee thick, so that their souls may be filled with horror and terror.

Now, I say, a time of strong and violent temptations is not a proper season for disputing this principle, *that God is*; but we must resolutely and stedfastly believe it. 1. Because it is a principle of faith, and the first principle of faith, as I cleared already: *He that cometh to God, must BELIEVE that he is*. Indeed, it is more an object of faith than of reason, upon the grounds I formerly laid down. 2. This hath been the practice of the saints; when they were sore assaulted, they resolved to stick to principles. As the prophet, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments (l)*. And the psalmist, *Truly God is good to Israel, &c (m)*. These worthy saints were tempted to entertain atheistical or unworthy thoughts of God, under his present dispensations. But what do they? They lay down some firm conclusions, or principles, which they resolve to stick to, without disputing them. As if they should say, We know and believe firmly, that God is righteous and good to his people, though we are at a loss in our own thoughts how to reconcile these things with his dispensations: So do you. Yea, Christ himself, though he was well able to baffle the devil by reason; yet, for a pattern to us, he repels him by the word of God: *It is written*; and again, *It is written (n)*. 3. It is dangerous to enter the lists with Satan, and to dispute with him by your naked reason. He is so subtle a disputant, that there is great odds between him and you: And you are less capable to manage the debate, when your heart is under the cloud of a temptation. When you think to conquer by your own wit and reason, you will find him too subtle and hard for you. O, how soon may he puzzle your reason, and put your thoughts to a non-plus? But there is a divine authority in the word of God, which faith builds upon; and it hath a throne in the conscience even of the devil himself.

Therefore, though you cannot comprehend the nature of God, nor answer the devil's sophistry; yet firmly believe that God is, because the scripture says it. In times of temptation,

(l) Jer. xii. 1. (m) Psal. lxxiii. 1. (n) Matth. iv.

tion, it is confutation enough, to answer Satan with resolution, and to hold fast this principle that he would wrest from you. "The creatures shew there is a God: But though they did not, it is enough to me that the word says it; and I will believe it, though I cannot make it good against all the fiery darts of the devil." Thus, you must not dispute, but believe. This is the effectual way to non-plus the devil. Yet it is good at other times to see upon what firm footing we stand. When the storm is over, and you are more composed, then back your faith with all the reasons and arguments you can.

Exhort. 4. Is it so, *that God is?* Then let us own and acknowledge his being, and give him the glory of a God, and that these ways. 1. By chusing him for our God. Not to take him for your God is a kind of denial of him. What comfort can it yield to you *that God is*, if he be not your God? The faith and thoughts of his being may justly be a terror to you, if you have no special interest in him. Therefore, get him for your God. For this end, renounce all other gods. These lusts and idols that are set up in your hearts in the room and place of God, must be renounced with an utter detestation, and without any secret reserve. And chuse God in Christ for your God. Chuse him wholly, in all that he is, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for your God and portion. And chuse him absolutely. There must be no ifs nor ands, no secret reserves, no conditions in your chusing God, nor any place left for repentance. 2. By seeking his favour, as the best of blessings. Certainly, if there be a God, it must be a great happiness to have his favour and friendship, and to keep in with him. Therefore, value his favour as the greatest good, and dread his displeasure as the greatest evil: And seek his favour in Christ with all earnestness and importunity; and keep it with all holy care and watchfulness. Be careful to please him, and afraid to offend him. O how exact and punctual should you be that you may keep in with God! 3. By worshipping him. If you acknowledge his being, it is a great folly not to worship him. By this only we acknowledge his Deity. Though you profess a belief of his being, yet by neglects of worship you deny that profession, and envy him the being that you cannot deprive him of. It was the condemnation of the Gentile world, *that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God (o)*. He that denies the being of God, is an atheist as to his essence; and he that denies

(o) Rom. i. 21.

denies his worship, is an atheist as to his honour and glory. 4. By a superlative love to him. Loving him above all things. This is to give him the glory of a God, when you give him the throne in your heart, and all other things are set down at his footstool. You should be able to say with the psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee* (p). 5. By meditating on him. Converse often with him in your thoughts. Forgetfulness of God is a kind of denial of him. It is made the black mark of an ungodly man or atheist, that *God is not in all his thoughts* (q). What comfort can be had from the being of God, if we do not think of him with reverence and delight? A God forgotten, is as good as no God to you. 6. By a life of humble dependence upon him. We do not own and acknowledge his being, unless we have recourse to him, and rely upon him, in all our wants, straits and distresses. Therefore depend on him continually through Christ for grace to do and suffer for him, to perform duties, vanquish temptations, and mortify corruptions. Depend on him for help and deliverance in all your troubles and dangers, support and comfort in all your distresses, the supply of all your wants, and counsel and direction in all your ways. This is to give him the glory of a God. 7. By living in subjection and obedience to him. You do not own him to be God, unless you be subject and obedient to his laws. This is his right as the Author of your being. *Fear God*, says the preacher, *and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man* (r). Orig. *For this is the whole of man*. Religion is as necessary as reason to compleat a man. So that you are not men, but beasts, if you do not reverence God's authority, and live in subjection and obedience to him. 8. By thankfulness to him for all his mercies: Acknowledging him as the Author and Fountain of all the blessings you receive and enjoy, and giving him the praise that is due unto his name.

Exhort. 5. Improve this principle, *that God is*.

1. To confirm your faith with respect to a judgment to come. For, if there be a God, he must be just and righteous, seeing this is essential to his nature. Now, the justice and righteousness of God requires, that it be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do ill: But it is not apparently so in this world; for the godly do often meet with oppression and injustice, even under colour of law: Therefore, there must be a day when all will be set right. This

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(p) Psal. lxxiii. 25. (q) Psal. x. 4. (r) Eccl. xii. 12.

is the apostle's argument; seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompence tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven (3): And the preacher's; I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (1). In this life the best many times go to the walls, and are exercised with poverty, shame and disgrace, oppression and injustice; while wicked men live at ease, and in pomp and pleasure. Therefore the justice and righteousness of God requires, that there be a day of judgment, when all things shall be set in good order.

2. To beget and maintain in your hearts a holy awe and reverence of the majesty of God. The more deep the sense of God's being be upon your hearts, you will fear and reverence him the more. If you believe there is a God; improve this to beget an awful apprehension of the infinite distance between him and you; and represent his being so to your souls, that in all your ways you may fear before him.

3. To influence you to the study of a life and walk answerable thereunto; that you may live like them that believe there is a God. Do you firmly believe *that God is*, and will you despise and dishonour him, and trample upon his authority, and rebel against him, and prefer every base lust before him? O, how unworthy is this! You that are professors of religion would take heed that you do not by your vicious lives tempt others to atheism. Live like them that have the sense of the being of God upon their hearts. Live so as your lives may manifest and proclaim to the world what sense you have of his being, and so as you may express the glorious perfections of God in your conversation, that the image of God may be seen stamped on your lives (u).

Exhort. 6. Is it so that he that cometh to God must believe that he is? Then, in coming to God, and seeking communion with him in duties of worship, fix your thoughts on the consideration of his being, and labour to revive this principle upon your hearts, *That God is*. This would be an excellent mean to prevent formality, carelessness, and irreverence in worship. Many, in their worship, do not act as unto a God, but as unto a mere idol. In all your addresses to God, be careful to bring and keep your hearts under the sense of

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God's

(1) 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. (2) Eccl. iii. 16, 17. (u) 1 Pet. ii. 9.

God's being. Though you cannot conceive *what he is*, yet be sure to fix your hearts in this, *that he is*. All acts of worship would be managed with more awe and reverence, if we went about them with a lively sense of the being of God, that so we might adore an infinite Majesty, concerning whom we know *that he is*, though we cannot comprehend him, *how he is*, and *what he is*, nor search out the Almighty unto perfection.

DISCOURSE III.

Of the Incomprehensibility of God.

SERMON X.

Prov. xxx. 4. — *What is his name? — If thou canst tell.*
 Job xi. 7. *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

FOUR things chiefly are necessary to be known concerning God. 1. That he is. 2. What he is. 3. That he is but one. 4. Who he is: God in three persons. Having spoken of the first of these, *That God is*; I now come to discourse to you of the second, *What he is*. And indeed this is a question that I cannot answer. And who can answer it? Though I had the tongue and understanding of men and angels, yet I could not tell you *what God is*. And though it were possible that you could get a full answer to this question, yet you could not possibly understand it. We cannot so much as tell his name. *What is his name, if thou canst tell?*

In the verses preceding this text, wise Agur makes a humble acknowledgment of his own ignorance and want of learning, especially in spiritual things. And then, in verse 4th, he shews that none can give a satisfying account of the works of providence, but God alone, whose works they are. Whereupon he challengeth any man so much as to tell his name, *What is his name?* &c. As if he had said, neither you, nor I, nor any mere creature, can tell his name; that is, declare his nature and perfections. It is true, in the holy scriptures, God hath been pleased to give unto himself divers names, whereby he makes himself, in some measure, known to us. Yet, as God hath no need of a discrete name (seeing he is a most singular Being, and infinitely distinct

distinct from all other beings, which in comparison of him are as no beings) so there is no name that can perfectly represent his essence. In relation to the creatures, he hath divers names: But if you ask what is his proper name, in relation to himself, he himself alone knows that: His essence is inexpressible and incomprehensible *.

This is more expressly declared in the other text I read to you. Job, in his discourses, seemed to complain of God's proceedings, because he saw not such a cause of God's dispensations toward him as he thought reasonable: Therefore Zophar, in my text, shews that God's ways toward man are far above his reach, seeing he himself is unsearchable.

In the words we may notice these two things.

1. The subject spoken of; *God, and the Almighty*. In the preceding verse, he had been speaking of the secrets of divine wisdom. Thence interpreters do generally conclude, that the text is to be understood chiefly of the wisdom of God, which is incomprehensible, so that the secrets thereof cannot be dived into by man. Therefore, that in God which cannot by searching be found out is, in the following verses, expressed by a word in the feminine gender, which may have a reference to the wisdom of God, which, in verse 6th, is expressed by another word in the same gender. But seeing God is the most simple and uncompounded Being, so that his attributes are not divers qualities in him, as they are in the creatures, but are really one and the same with his essence; therefore, though we should understand these words of the wisdom of God, yet they must needs be true also of his essence and attributes. And why may we not understand the words more generally of the divine essence: For Zophar, having, in verse 6th, spoken of the wisdom of God as a secret, a great and unsearchable depth, he here shews that it must needs be so, seeing God himself is unsearchable. And so we have,

2. The position concerning God Almighty. This is laid down by way of question, in two particulars, *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out, &c.* The word in the original here rendered *searching*, signifies the exactest diligence in enquiry. As if he had said, Canst thou, by all thy studies and endeavours, or the utmost improvement of

* *Attalus Martyr, a tyranno per contemptum interrogatus, quod nomen Deus haberet? Qui plures sunt, respondit, nominibus discernuntur: qui autem unus est, non indiget nomine.* Euseb. Histor. L. 6. c. 3.

of all thine abilities, find out God? The question imports a vehement denial; *Canst thou find him out?* No, surely, thou canst not; thine own conscience will tell thee so much; how absurd were it once to imagine that thou canst? But is not God to be found by searching? Certainly he is. Much of God may be found and seen in his works: For, *the heavens declare his glory (a)*; and the *invisible* perfections of God are *clearly seen* in the things he hath made (*b*); and there are yet clearer discoveries of him to be had by faith; Moses saw him *who is invisible (c)*. But though we may *find God* by searching, yet we cannot *find him out*; that is, we cannot attain to the full knowledge of him, or the full discovery of his Majesty. Some render these words thus, *Canst thou find out the searchings of God*; or *the last, sum, or whole of God*: And so it falls in with what follows, *Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* These words are exegetical of the former. We may *find him out*, in some sense, but *not to perfection*; not so, as fully and perfectly to understand his nature and perfections. We can never come to the uttermost of what God is. This is too hard a task for any mere creature.

From these texts thus explained I propose this doctrine,
God is unsearchable and incomprehensible.

And here we have an answer to that question, *What is God?* Indeed, he is such a Being that we cannot fully tell what he is. We cannot form an adequate conception of him. We cannot comprehend his nature and perfections. Though we should rack our wits to the utmost, and ply our studies never so hard, to search into his nature; yet we can never find him out. Therefore, when Moses asked the Lord, *What is thy name?* The Lord answers, *I AM THAT I AM (d)*. A strange answer: But the only pertinent answer to such a question. It is a name that, among other things, imports his unsearchableness: As when any man asks us concerning a thing, what it is; if we would conceal and hide it from him, we say, *it is what it is*. Well then, this is the fittest notion wherein we can take up God, That he is unsearchable, the incomprehensible Being, infinitely beyond all that we can speak or think, an unfathomable depth and boundless ocean of all perfection. Many have racked their wits to search into the mysteries and riddles of the Deity; but I think that poor heathen, Simo- nides, said more in silence, than many have said in much speaking: For he being asked by Hiero, a king, what God was

(a) Psal. xix. 1. (b) Rom. i. 20. (c) Heb. xi. 27.
 (d) Exod. iii. 14.

was, desired a day to think upon it; and when that day was at an end, he desired two days; and when these were past, he desired four days: Thus he still doubled the number of days, in which he desired to think of God, ere he would give an answer: Whereupon the king wondering, asked at him what he meant by this; to which he answered, * *The more I think of him, he is still the more dark and unknown to me.* Indeed he that would tell you what God is, in any measure answerably to his excellency, had need to know God as he is known of him.

For clearing this, know that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible.

1. In his works. Elihu, speaking of the works of God, cries out, *Behold, God is great, and we know him not (e).* He is great, so that we cannot fully take him up in his works. We cannot comprehend even that of his power and wisdom that he is pleased to manifest in his works. Hence the apostle cries out, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God? How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out (f)?* Man cannot understand his own way (g); much less the ways of an infinite God. His judgments are a great depth (h). We may as well expect to fathom the deepest part of the sea, or to span the heaven, or to contain the ocean in a nut-shell, as fully and perfectly to understand the ways and works of God. We see but a part of his ways (i).

2. In his essence and attributes. *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out (k).* Hence he is said to dwell in the light which no man can approach unto (l). Indeed, with respect to his being simply, God is easily found out; for there is a sense of his being engraven upon the hearts of all men: But with respect to the manner of his being, how he is, and what he is; thus we cannot find him out. *Canst thou by searching find out God? No, no. It is utterly impossible by all the helps and advantages, of nature, art, and grace, yea, of glory too, to find out God fully. This only we can comprehend of God, that he cannot be comprehended. What is his name, if thou canst tell? To speak properly, God is above*

* *Quanto diutius considero, tanto magis obscurior mihi videtur.*
Cic. de Nat. Deor. L. 2. C. 26.

(e) Job xxxvi. 26. (f) Rom. xi. 33. (g) Prov. xx. 24.
(h) Psal. xxxvi. 6. (i) Job xxvi. 14. (k) Job xxxvii. 23.
(l) 1 Tim. vi. 16.

bove all name. The heathens had divers names for their false and fictitious deities. But Plutarch tells us, that some Africans did call an unknown God whom they worshipped, Amon, that is, in our language, *Hark, who art thou? Why askest thou after my name*, said the increated Angel to Manoah, *seeing it is secret, or wonderful (m)*. God's name is a great secret, or mystery; a hidden mystery, out of the reach of all created capacities. No man can express that incomprehensible Majesty. God himself cannot express it to our capacity, because we are not capable to understand what he can express. Therefore it is best for us to be silent, as to any aim of expressing fully what he is; and, indeed, a humble believing silence here, would be our rarest eloquence. I shall further clear this doctrine under these two propositions.

1. *God is unsearchable and incomprehensible by us in this state of imperfection.*
2. *He is unsearchable and incomprehensible by any created understanding whatsoever.*

Propos. 1. God is unsearchable and incomprehensible by us in this state of imperfection.

We cannot comprehend him; we cannot find him out. *Canst THOU by searching find out God? Thou, a poor mean, vile worm, crawling on the earth, dost thou think to search him out unto perfection, or to contain and comprehend him whom the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain? Dost thou think that the short line of thy understanding can fathom this boundless Being? No, no, it is impossible.* When holy Augustine, walking by the sea, was rapt in the meditations of God, he heard a voice saying, *Drain the ocean with a cockle-shell*. We may sooner drain the ocean with a little shell, than comprehend the glorious perfections of God in our understanding. God hath been the subject of the discourses and debates of men in all ages: Yet after all, every age must give him this testimony, *We have heard the fame of him, but he is hid from the eyes of all living (n)*. Much hath been spoken of God; but, O how small a portion hath been understood of him? All our knowledge of him reaches no further than a believing affectionate admiration of him. The prophet cries out, *Who is a God like unto thee (o)?* And Israel in

(m) Judges, xiii. 18. (n) Job xxviii. 21, 22. (o) Micah, vii. 18.

in their song, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord!* — *who is like thee* (p)! And admiration implies ignorance. Hence it is that they who know God best, are most sensible of their ignorance of him; because such as know him best, know this of him, that he cannot be known. Hence Elihu cries out, *Behold, God is great, and we know him not* (q). They find that he is unsearchable. I shall here,

1. Clear this proposition a little further.

2. Assign some reasons thereof.

First, That we have no full or comprehensive knowledge of God in this life, appears from the several ways of knowing God. The school-men tell us *, that there are three ways of knowing God in this life. 1. By way of casuality. 2. By way of eminency. 3. By way of negation †. Now, I shall shew you that in all these ways of knowing God, we come vastly short of knowing him as he is in himself.

1. By way of casuality. When we observe the vast influence that God hath upon all the creatures; that from him they have their being, life and motion; and that all their perfections are from him as the first cause: We thence conclude that all these perfections must be virtually in God. But these are but weak apprehensions of God that we have this way. By this means, we know rather *that God is*, than *what he is*. We know this way, that there is a supreme Being, a First Cause, a Being of beings, that hath given a being to all other beings, and is the Fountain of all created perfections: Yet still we are at a loss, *what that Being is*. We do but grope after him in the dark, and guess at his Majesty, by the glorious emanations of his power and wisdom, and the rays of them which he is pleased to display in all the works of his hands; and from all these concurring testimonies of him, we gather but this confused notion of him, that he is the self-existent, independent Being, the Fountain and Original of all other beings: Yet still we are in the dark, what a Being he is in himself.

2. We come to know God by way of eminency. When we observe what perfections are in the creatures; we do thence conclude that all these perfections must be in God in

(p) Exod. xv. 11.

(q) Job xxxvi. 26.

* Ex Dionysio lib. de divin. nomin. C. 7.

† 1. *Via casualitatis, per attributa relativa.* 2. *Via eminentiæ, per attributa absoluta.* 3. *Via negationis, per attributa negativa.*

in an eminent and transcendent way; and so affirm that of God, by way of eminency, which is excellent in the creatures. As for example: When we observe some wisdom, goodness, and holiness, in some of the creatures; we do thence rationally conclude, that God must be eminently wise, and good and holy. These perfections are in the creatures in a finite and dependent way; therefore they must be in him infinitely and independently. All these perfections that are scattered among all the creatures, and are in them finite, do all centre and meet in him after an infinite manner. So that, we must winnow all the creatures from all their imperfections, and then take the best and choicest of them to set forth some dark resemblance of the glorious majesty of God. Hence it is, that in scripture, God is called by, and compared to, whatever is good, and answerable, either to necessity, or conveniency, or delight. He is called the *light and life* of his people; their *bread and water*; their *dwelling-place*; their *shield, buckler, and high tower*, and a *feast of fat things* for them. And indeed, what are all the works of his hands, but beams of his increated light, and streams of his inexhaustible ocean of goodness? So that whatever perfections are in them, are eminently and virtually in him. There is no quality, property, or virtue, that hath the least shadow of goodness, but he is that, eminently, infinitely, essentially and eternally.

Yet, after all this, any knowledge we can have of God this way is but very weak and imperfect, as appears from these two things.

(1.) Because the best and purest of all the creatures, and all their perfections, even the quintessence of them, are but dregs in comparison of the glorious majesty of God, who chargeth his angels with folly. So that, when the divine perfections are set forth by these excellencies in the creatures, this is God's stooping low to our weak capacity. For, God is not like the creatures, nor is there any proportion between him and them: So that, when we draw our lessons from them, it is impossible we can have a notion of God commensurate to his glorious and immense being. For all the excellencies of men and angels are not worthy to be a shadow of the glorious excellency of God; seeing *all nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity* (r). All the creatures, and all their excellencies united, do not amount to the value of one unite,
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(r) Isa. xl. 17.

if compared with God. So that you have as yet taken up but a very dim notion of God, when you have conceived him to be the most eminent of all beings; seeing all beings before him are as nothing: For when you conceive God to be the best, you still attribute something to the creature; seeing every comparative or superlative includes the positive; so that you take up only some different degrees, between them that differ so infinitely, so incomprehensibly.

(2.) Because all our attainment of knowledge this way, reaches no further than such a question as that, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord?* For, when we climb up upon the shoulders of all created excellencies, and there proclaim that there is none in heaven or earth that can be compared unto the Lord; all that we attain unto, is only to know, that *he is not like* any other thing that we know, but not to know *what he is*. So that, this way of knowing God, breeds admiration rather than knowledge. For, when we hear or conceive that there is such a glorious Being, who hath all perfections eminently and infinitely centered in him, we then admire what this Being should be; and admiration, at best, is but a stupified kind of knowledge, if I may so phrase it.

3. We come to know God by way of negation: That is, by denying of God or removing from him, in our conceptions of him, these imperfections that we find in the creatures, and are inconsistent with a Deity. Thus, the scripture doth often hold him forth, when it tells us, that God *seeth not as man seeth* (s); that *with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning* (t); that *he is not a man that he should lie, &c* (n). Again, when we call God *infinite, immense, unchangeable*; all these are but negatives: The plain meaning is, that he is not finite, is confined to no bounds, is subject to no change. Again, when we say, that God is *unsearchable and incomprehensible*; these are but negatives. This way of knowing God, by way of negation, is more easy than the former: For, we better understand *what God is not*, than *what he is*. And much of our knowledge of God in this life, is by this way. When in our conceptions of God, we remove from him all these imperfections that are inconsistent with his being, we do more strongly assert his being, and know more of him, than when in our conceptions we elevate him above all. Yet, as I said, by this way of knowing, we rather know *what God is not*, than *what he is*:

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(s) 1 Sam. xvi. 7. (t) James i. 17. (u) Num. xxiii. 19.

And you will easily own that to be but a weak knowledge, when we cannot tell you what a thing is, but what it is not. When we have conceived all of God that we can, we are so overcome with the dazling brightness of his glory, that we can find no better names and notions to express him by, than those that do withal express our own ignorance of him. And what is this, but after all our searching, to proclaim him to be unsearchable and incomprehensible, and that indeed we do not know him.

S E R M O N XI.

Second, **I** COME, in the next place, to give some reasons why we can have no full or comprehensive knowledge of God, or adequate conceptions of him, in this imperfect state. And I shall insist a little on these two reasons. 1. Because, in this life, God manifests and lets out but little of himself to us. 2. Because of our incapacity.

Reas. 1. We cannot have a full and comprehensive knowledge of God, because in this life God manifests and lets out but little of himself to us. We have but imperfect discoveries of God. Job cries out, *Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him (a)?* Or, as the Vulgar renders it, *how little a drop?* or as others, *how little a whisper is heard of him?* And then it follows, *but the thunder of his power who can understand?* That which God is pleased to discover to us of his majesty, is in comparison of what he is in himself, but as a small drop to the ocean, or as a whisper to a terrible thunder. The Heathens hear somewhat of God from the voice of his works; and his saints hear far more of him from his blessed word: But O, how little is heard of him, in comparison of the excellency that is in him? Though Moses was dignified with the greatest familiarity with God; yet he could arise no higher than to *see his backparts (b)*. In this life Christ *shews himself through the lattice, or tirlefs (c)*. We have but some glimpses of God's glory and beauty. The best of the saints see but some *appearance of the likeness of his glory (d)*.

Let us hear how the apostle expresseth this. *For, says he, now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face (e)*. The word rendered *darkly*, may be also rendered *in a riddle*. Now, a riddle is an intricate and cloudy speech, locked up from

(a) Job xxvi. 14. (b) Exod. xxxiii. 23. (c) Cant. ii. 9. (d) Ezek. i. ult. (e) 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

from vulgar understandings : So our knowledge of God, in this life, is cloudy and ænigmatical. But whence is it that we see but *darkly* ? Because we see *through a glass*. So the same apostle tells us elsewhere, *We all with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord (f)*. Though believers behold *with open face*, yet it is but *as in a glass*. With reference to the Jews, under the Old Testament, who were under clouds of ceremonies and prophecies, we behold *with open face* ; but, with reference to the saints in glory, we behold but *as in a glass*. And this expression, of *beholding as in a glass*, imports that any knowledge we have of God in this life, is, 1. But weak, and dark and cloudy, like the weak and languishing representation of a thing in a glass. And, 2. That it is but mediate. God doth not in this life manifest himself immediately to his people. We see only some broken beams of his glory, by looking-glasses of his making, means of his appointment.

The insufficiency of these glasses, in which we see God in this life, doth plainly argue that we have but imperfect discoveries of him. I shall mention some of them. As, 1. The glass of the creatures. In the creatures we have a representation of the glorious perfections of God, his infinite power, wisdom and goodness. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork, &c (g)*. And his eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (h). Yet in this glass we see but darkly : For, as the eye of the soul is blinded by sin, so there is not the least shadow of the infinite treasures of divine love, grace, and mercy, represented in this glass. 2. The glass of human learning. But though learned men have many advantages beyond others, yet they see but darkly, even in the works of nature ; how much more dark and cloudy must their knowledge be of the glorious Author of nature ? 3. The glass of providence. Providence affords us many clear instances and examples, wherein, as in a looking-glass, we may behold the infinite justice and holiness of God, his infinite goodness and mercy, and his infinite power and wisdom. Yet in this glass we see but darkly : For we see but *part of his ways (i)*. The works of creation and providence are, as it were, but a whisper concerning God. And providence is very mysteries : there are many riddles in it. The apostle Paul himself, like one amazed, cries out, *How unsearchable*

(f) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

(g) Psal. xix. 1, 2, 3, 4.

(i) Job xxvi. 14.

(h) Rom. i. 20.

searchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out (k)? God's ways are in the deep. *Thy way is in the sea, says the psalmist, and thy path in the great waters: and thy footsteps are not known (l).* We cannot trace his footsteps in his ways of providence. 4. The glass of the holy scriptures. This is by far the clearest glass of all, wherein we behold the clear reflections of God. Yet, even in this glass, we see but darkly. Indeed, the holy scriptures discover to us as much of the nature and attributes of God as could be drawn by lines and letters: but all words, even the most significant, comprehensive and superlative words, fall infinitely short of expressing what God is, as he is in himself. Therefore he speaks of himself to us in the holy scriptures, with great condescension to our frailty and weakness, and ushers himself into our minds, by shadows and resemblances, and speeches borrowed from poor creatures.

Reas. 2. We cannot have a full and comprehensive knowledge of God in this life, because of our incapacity. Though the ocean hath water enough to fill the largest vessel, yet it can communicate no more to it than the vessel is capable to contain: So here, there is enough in God to fill the largest understanding, but our capacity is very shallow. You may exceed all other subjects in your expressions and apprehensions of them; but here is a subject wherein there can be no excess: Yea, there is no access to it; for he *dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto (m).* The mind is much more comprehensive than words; yet our minds are too narrow to conceive him. Even the heart of a Solomon, though enlarged as the sand on the sea-shore, was not large enough for the great God. *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.* God is sometimes said to dwell in light (n), to shew the greatness of his majesty; and sometimes he is said to dwell in darkness, to shew our weakness and incapacity to apprehend him as he is in himself. *He made darkness his secret place, says the psalmist: his pavilion round about him was dark waters (o).* The eye of the soul can no more look upon the dazzling brightness of God, than a man can look stedfastly on the sun shining in his strength. The abundance of that inaccessible light, bearing no proportion

(k) Rom. xi. 33. (l) Psal. lxxvii. 19. (m) 1 Tim. vi. 16. (n) 1 Tim. vi. 16. (o) Psal. xviii. 11.

tion to our understanding, doth so dazzle the eye of the soul, that it becomes as darkness to it. When the eye of the soul is fixed in the contemplation of that shining and glorious Majesty, his inaccessible light is, by reason of our weakness, that glorious and resplendent darkness that blinds us so that we cannot look on him. In this sense, *clouds and darkness are round about him* (p). Though he be not far from us, yet he is far above us, and far beyond us; far above our thoughts, and beyond our conceptions. This ocean cannot be measured by our little shell. We can have no adequate conceptions of his majesty. We cannot speak or think worthily of him; seeing he is infinitely greater than our words, and vaster than our understandings.

In prosecuting this a little further, I shall,

1. *Propose some evidences of our incapacity in this present state to comprehend God, or to have adequate conceptions of him.*
2. *Show whence it is that our capacity is so shallow.*

1. Our incapacity, in this present state, to comprehend the majesty of God, or to form any adequate conception of him, appears from these three considerations.

Consid. 1. We cannot search out or measure the several dimensions of the works of God, of heaven and hell, of the sea and dry land. To this purpose are the words following my text: *Canst thou by searching find out God, &c. It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do, &c.* The several dimensions of heaven and hell, of the sea and land, cannot be exactly found out and measured. And if we cannot measure that which is finite, what then can we know of him who is infinite? If neither the height of heaven, nor the depth of hell, nor the length of the earth, nor the breadth of the sea, can be found out and measured exactly; much less can we *find out the Almighty unto perfection*. How can we comprehend the height of his power, or the depth of his wisdom, or the breadth of his love, or the length of his duration †? Would he not be thought a fool who would undertake to ascend into the starry heavens, to measure the magnitude and distance of the celestial bodies; or to climb up the highest storeys of heaven,

(p) Psal. xcvi. 2.

† *Quid est Deus? Longitudo, latitudo, sublimitas, profundum. Longitudo propter aeternitatem: Latitudo propter charitatem: Sublimitas propter maiestatem: profundum propter sapientiam.* Bern. de Consider.

heaven, to take the dimensions of them? Yet he that would find out God unto perfection, must climb infinitely higher, seeing the heavens, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him. Who knows what lies hid and yet undiscovered in the bowels of the earth? much less can any know what is in the depth of hell, what dreadful torments there are there: How then can we know or comprehend him who *setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection; the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death (q)*? We cannot with our arms fathom the sea and dry land; how then can we find out him who *hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance (r)*? We cannot measure the circumference of heaven; much less can we comprehend him who *stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (s)*?

Confid. 2. We cannot comprehend the nature of the creatures that are near us, and that we have in our view. Though we behold the sun, moon, and stars, yet we do not fully understand the nature of them. How often are wise men puzzled to know the forms and souls of brutes and plants? We cannot pierce into their hidden natures. The greatest wits have not been able to satisfy their own understandings, in the reasons of the ebbings and flowings of the sea, of the attractive virtue of the loadstone, &c. There are a thousand other things in nature that nonplus the reason of man. How often do learned men betake themselves to secret sympathies and antipathies, and occult qualities, as a cloke and covert for their ignorance? Yea, how blind are we in the nature of our own souls, that we do continually carry about with us? How then is it possible for us to conceive aright of the divine nature, as it is in itself? If we cannot comprehend most things in the world, how can we comprehend the majesty of God? If we cannot comprehend his works, much less can we comprehend his nature: For, the works of God are finite, and many of them visible to us, and obvious to our senses; but the Divine Essence is wholly infinite, and invisible, and cannot be apprehended by sense, seeing he dwells in the light that is inaccessible.

Confid. 3. We cannot behold any extraordinary created appearance or manifestation of God, without fear and consternation. Eliphaz had an extraordinary vision of God: but
he

(q) Job xxviii. 3. (r) Isa. xl. 12. (s) Isa. xl. 22.

he could not behold it without *fear and trembling*, so that *all his bones did shake*, and the *hair of his flesh stood up* (t). And we read, what fear and trembling, and fainting, seized on Daniel, when he had an extraordinary vision of God (u). And such a manifestation of the glory of God did shew itself on Mount Sinai, that Moses himself did *exceedingly fear and quake* (x). Now, these eminent saints did not see God immediately, but only some visible manifestation of his presence and glory; yet they could not look upon it without fear and fainting: How much less are we able to look upon God, in his full beauty and brightness, and boundless excellency and perfection?

- ✓ 2. Let me shew you whence it is that our capacity, to conceive of God, is so shallow in this imperfect state. Take these reasons or causes of it. 1. There is a cloud of sin upon the eye of the soul; a thick mist upon the understanding. Believers themselves are not perfectly cured of their natural blindness. There are still thick scales upon our eyes, and too much of the vail upon our hearts: So that it is with believers as with a man that hath sore eyes; he cannot see so clearly as another whose eyes are whole and sound. 2. The soul is clogged with fleshly clay. The motions of the body, by reason of its weakness and infirmities, do greatly obstruct the operations of the soul: So that it is with the soul as with a man that is shut up in a dark room; the light shines in only through some small holes and rifts; but tho' the sun shine never so brightly, yet he cannot see the glory of it: So, while we are shut up in this dungeon of flesh, we cannot see the glory of God. When the soul tries the wing, and flutters toward heaven, it is presently pulled down again by this earthly clay that we carry about with us. 3. Corrupt and turbulent affections do oft-times confound the eye of the soul. As Hagar could not see the well that was before her, by reason of her passion and grief, till God opened her eyes (y): So we are oft-times blinded with passions, love and fear, desire and anger, or some cloud interposing from the passions, so that we cannot see God and the things of God so clearly. 4. In this imperfect state, our apprehensions of things take their rise from sense and sensible things. Our poor narrow minds are, as it were, immersed and drowned in bodies of clay; so that we cannot think of things without some corporeal

(t) Job iv. 12, 13, 14. (u) Dan. x. (x) Heb. xii. 21.
(y) Gen. xxi. 10.

poreal representations. Hence it is that we are not able to conceive of God as he is: For although we labour to refine and spiritualize our thoughts of God, and aim at more raised and abstracted conceptions of his majesty, by separating that which is bodily from that which is spiritual; yet even when we frame the highest notions of God, there is still some similitude of some corporeal thing in our fancy, and some dregs of matter sticking to our conceptions of him; so that we cannot frame any suitable pure notion of his abstracted nature.

So much for the first proposition, viz. That God is unsearchable and incomprehensible by us, in this state of imperfection. I now proceed to

Propos. 2. God is unsearchable and incomprehensible by any created understanding.

I shall, 1. *Clear this truth.*

2. *Confirm it.*

First. I clear it. No created being whatsoever, no not in its best state, with all imaginable advantages, can find out God unto perfection. All creatures are too shallow to take him up. As he fills heaven and earth, so he fills the understandings of angels and men, but is comprehended by neither of them. God alone hath the full and comprehensive knowledge of himself. And,

1. The glorified saints above cannot comprehend him, they cannot find him out unto perfection. Indeed, they know God in a more excellent manner than we can know him here on earth: *They see face to face* (z). It is controverted amongst schoolmen and divines, whether the very essence of God will be seen by the glorified saints. But let us wave and adjourn that debate, till we come to heaven and see, if ever it be our happiness to come there, as indeed it will be the happiness of very few. Only, there are two things clear from the text I just now quoted, and other texts of scripture. 1. That the glorified saints shall see the face of God: *As for me, says the psalmist, I shall behold thy face in righteousness* (a). They shall see him in his greatest glory, in the resplendent and conspicuous lustre of all his divine perfections. 2. That they shall see him *face to face* (b); that is, clearly and immediately, and not darkly, or by reflection, as in a looking-glass. The curtain shall then be drawn aside, and the beautiful face of God be unveiled. The direct beams of
divine

(z) 1 Cor. xiii. 12. (a) Psal. xvii. ult. (b) 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

divine glory shall shine into the mind, and the light of God dart immediately upon the soul. Whatever appearances of the glory of God are offered here to our view, yet there is something within the curtain that will outshine all.

But though these things be so, yet the saints in heaven shall have no comprehensive knowledge of God. The most enlarged capacity of the glorified saints, shall not be large enough to comprehend all his glory. Therefore that manifestation of the glory of God in heaven, must be proportioned to the capacity of the creature, else it would confound and not satisfy. God must infinitely condescend, even in heaven itself, and accommodate the appearances of his glory to the apprehensions of poor finite creatures. The saints in heaven shall know God perfectly, so far as creatures are capable to know him: Yet they shall not know him to perfection. They shall then see and know so much of God as will make them perfectly happy: But to know him to perfection, is more than comes to the share of the happiness of any creature *. And though it be said, *that we shall see him as he is (c)*: Yet it is most agreeable to the context to understand this of a sight of Christ in his human nature. But if we understand it of a sight of God, then it is that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what it is. Only in general, to see God as he is, is to see him, not only by way of negation, or by way of eminency, or by way of casuality, as we see and know him in this life: But it is to see that positive excellency in God; to see him in his eminency, and the absolute perfection of his own nature; and to see him as he is in himself, and not in his effects only. But to see whole God, and to see him wholly and fully, is above the capacity of any creature.

2. The glorious angels cannot comprehend him; they cannot find him out unto perfection. Though they have the fullest vision of God, and know him in a more excellent manner than other creatures can do; yet to eternity they will never be able to comprehend the essence of God. Therefore they are represented *covering their faces with their wings (d)* before the throne of God. Importing that the Deity is too

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O

mysterious

* *Plenam divinitatis naturam, nec angelus quilibet, nec sanctum aliquis, perfecte intelligere poterit, nedum videre.* Aug. de inquisit. Trinit.

(c) 1 John iii. 2. (d) Isa. vi. 2.

mysterious for their understanding. They cover their faces from the radiant and shining brightness of his majesty, as not being able to behold his glory. Though they *do always behold the face of God* (e); yet can they never comprehend his greatness and majesty. God is represented, in Ezekiel's vision, as sitting *above the head of the cherubims* (f). He is infinitely above the fulness and brightness even of an angelical understanding. Yea,

3. Even the human nature of Christ cannot comprehend God. For, Christ's human nature being but a Creature; therefore his human understanding, though it be enlarged far beyond that of any mere creature, yet absolutely considered, is but of a finite capacity, and so bears no proportion to the infinite majesty of God. Though his human nature, being straitly united to the divine nature in his person, doth behold the essence of God, yet it cannot comprehend it. Christ as a man *, sees whole God, but he doth not see him wholly and fully.

S E R M O N XII.

Second, **I** Proceed to confirm the truth of this proposition, That God is unsearchable and incomprehensible by any created understanding. I shall only give two arguments for the proof of it; and shall insist a little upon them, because I shall here take occasion to speak something of the nature of the divine attributes.

Arg. 1. God must be unsearchable and incomprehensible by any created understanding, because he is a most simple and uncompounded Being. He is one most pure essence, without all parts, members, accidents, qualities, or any other composition whatsoever: Yea, he is not capable of the least composition. So much is implied in that name he hath taken to himself, *I AM THAT I AM* (a). And it appears also from his infinite excellency and perfection. Any thing, the more simple it is, is the more excellent and perfect. Hence some observe that the same word in the Hebrew language, signifies both simple and perfect. In a thing compounded

(e) Matth. xviii. 10. (f) Ezek. x. 1.

* *Videt Deum* ὁλον ἀλλ' ἔχ' ὅλως. Wollieb. Compend. Lib. 1. Cap. 16.

(a) Exod. iii. 14.

compounded of parts, the parts are, at least in order of nature, before the thing which is compounded of them; and it hath some kind of dependence on its parts, and is divisible into these parts of which it is compounded: But none of these can have place here, they being all repugnant to the divine nature.

Now, seeing God is a most pure, simple and uncompounded essence or Being; therefore we cannot know him comprehensively, or as he is in himself. God being incapable of the least division into parts, we cannot know him as he is in himself, unless we could by one positive conception conceive him wholly and fully, which it is plain is above the capacity of any creature. Hence it is that all the knowledge we have of God is by different conceptions of these things whereby he is pleased to manifest himself to us.

Therefore God, in condescension to our weakness, is pleased to come, as it were, out of his inaccessible light, and to manifest himself to us by certain attributes; such as independency, immensity, infinity, eternity, immutability, wisdom, power, holiness, &c. All which are so many rays of the divine perfection let down to us. So that the attributes of God are, *these perfections of the divine nature whereby he is pleased to make himself known to us; or which are attributed to him, that we may the better understand him.* They are called *attributes*, because God attributes them to himself for our sake, that by them we may the better conceive what he is. And they are called *properties*, because they are proper and peculiar to God, and are so in him as they are not in any creature. For, though some of these attributes, such as wisdom, power, holiness, &c. be called generally by *divines communicable attributes*, because some vestige or shadow of them is to be found in men and angels; yet, as they are in him, they are incommunicable to any creature. To this purpose is that description that is given of God in our Shorter Catechism; *God is a Spirit*: But what a Spirit is he? *Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable*: Wherein is he infinite, eternal, and unchangeable? He is so, *in his being, wisdom, power, &c.* So that these attributes, as they are in him, cannot possibly be found in any other.

Further, the attributes of God are not qualities or properties in him, as attributes are in men and angels. They do not really differ among themselves, or from the divine essence, but are the very essence of God. They are *that one most pure essence, diversly apprehended by us, as it is diversly made known*

known to us. The attributes of God are himself; for whatever is in God, is himself, his very being. Therefore, that which is a quality in men and angels, is attributed to God in the abstract. Men and angels are wise and holy: But God is not only wise, but wisdom; as he is often called in the book of the Proverbs. And he is, not only holy, but holiness. Hence the prophet prays, *Behold from the habitation of thy holiness (b).* His wisdom and holiness, are his very essence. The holiness of God, is the holy God. *I have sworn by my holiness (c),* says the Lord, that is, by myself; for, so the apostle interprets it; *Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself (d).* So, the wisdom of God, is the wise God; and the truth of God, is the true God, &c. All his attributes are himself, his very essence. But they are attributed to God, to supply the defect of our capacity. We are not able to understand that which is to be known of God, under one name, or by one act of the understanding: Therefore, God is pleased to manifest himself, in condescension to our weak capacity, by certain attributes, which differ only in regard of the different objects and effects, and in our apprehensions and conceptions of him; but are really all one in him, and the same with his essence. When he manifests himself one way, we call that his power; when he manifests himself another way, we call that his mercy; and when he manifests himself a third way, we call that his justice. His punishing the wicked, is his justice; his relieving the miserable, is his mercy; his performing his promises, is his faithfulness; his bearing with sinners, is his patience, &c. So that there are not many things in God; but all these attributes that are diversly apprehended by us, are one excellency in him, and the same with his essence. As a sun-beam, shining through a red glass, gives a red reflection; and shining through a green glass, it gives a green reflection; and shining through a blue glass, it gives a blue reflection: And yet, all the while, the beam is the same.

Thus I have shewed you that God is a most pure, simple and uncompounded Being; so that we cannot know him comprehensively, nor positively conceive him. Indeed there is nothing in the world, that we can attain to the full understanding of by one positive conception; far less can we thus attain to a full understanding of the glorious majesty of God: And different conceptions cannot serve for conceiving him

(b) Isa. lxiii. 15. (c) Psal. lxxxix. 36. (d) Heb. vi. 13.

him as he is in himself, seeing he is a most pure, simple, indivisible Being.

Arg. 2. God must needs be unsearchable and incomprehensible by any created understanding, because he is an infinite Being, and all creatures are but finite; and that which is finite cannot comprehend that which is infinite. God is truly and absolutely infinite, and unmeasurable; He cannot be bounded or limited. He is absolutely free from any limitation of time, place, or degree. All creatures are limited; there are bounds set to them by their causes: But God hath no cause; he is independent; he is wholly of himself, and what is of itself cannot be limited by any other thing.

Now, because he is infinite, therefore he must be unsearchable and incomprehensible. As considered in himself, he is infinite; as considered in relation to our understanding, he is incomprehensible. There must be some proportion between the faculty and the object: But what proportion can there be between a finite understanding and an infinite essence? If God could be comprehended by any finite understanding, then he were not infinite. If we poor creatures could comprehend God, and enclose an infinite being in our understanding, we would be greater than God, the least thought whereof is horridly blasphemous. The vast ocean may be sooner contained in a nut-shell, than an infinite God can be contained in the limited understandings of men and angels. There is no measuring of an infinite Being.

More particularly, God is infinite and consequently incomprehensible. 1. In regard of being and perfection. 2. In regard of place. 3. In regard of time.

1. In regard of being and perfection. He is infinitely and absolutely perfect. All excellencies and perfections are, either formally or eminently, found in him, above all measure and degree: So that there is no measure of his perfection. He cannot be bounded or limited. All creatures, in comparison of him, are *as nothing, and less than nothing, and vanity* (e). In this sense he is often called Great; yea, *a Great King, and a Great God, above all gods* (f). Great in excellency, worth, and perfection. His greatness denotes an incomprehensible and unmeasurable vastness of all excellencies. None can set bounds to terminate the greatness and excellency of God. *His greatness is unsearchable* (g). *Behold, God is great, and we know him not* (h). We know not

(e) Isa. xl. 17. (f) Psal. xcvi. 3. (g) Psal. cxlv. 3.
(h) Job xxxvi. 26.

not how great he is; or we know not the utmost of his greatness. There is no proportion between the greatness of God and the understanding of a creature: For the greatness of God is infinite, but our understandings are finite; so that we cannot comprehend his greatness and perfection.

2. In regard of place. His essential presence is not bounded or limited by any place: He is every where present. This the psalmist declares, *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there, &c (i).* And says the Lord by the prophet, *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord (k).* He fills heaven and earth with his essence *. No place can be imagined that is destitute of the presence of God. He is essentially present in all places, and with all his creatures. *He is not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being (l).*

But though he is, from the height of heaven to the bottom of the depth, in every point of the world, and in the whole circle of it; yet he is not limited by it, but beyond it. *Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain him (m).* The starry heaven or firmament is very large; it compasseth the whole world; this terrestrial world is but a point in comparison of it: But the heaven of heavens is yet much more vast; it contains the starry heaven; yet it cannot contain the great God. As he was before the world, and space, and all things; so he was to himself a world, and space, and every thing. He is really out of the world, in himself, as he was in himself before the world was made †: As one answered another that asked him, where his God was before the world was made? *He was then, said he, where he is now, in himself, because he is sufficient to himself ‡.*

Now, seeing God is infinite in his essence and being, he must needs be incomprehensible. We cannot conceive the vastness and glory of the heavens; much less can we conceive him that is so great as to fill heaven and earth, yea, so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. There is

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(i) Psal. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10. (k) Jer. xxiii. 24.

* *Jovis omnia plena.* Virg. Eccl. 3.

(l) A& xvii. 27, 28. (m) 1 Kings viii. 27.

† *Ante omnia Deus erat solus; ipse sibi & mundus, & locus, & omnia.* Tertull. Con. Prax. C. 5.

‡ *Tunc ubi nunc, in se, quoniam sibi sufficit ipse.*

no proportion between a boundless being and a bounded understanding. Can we think to contain or apprehend him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain or comprehend? Can we think that the short line of a finite understanding can fathom this boundless Being? We know that there is an infinite God; but his infinity or immensity surpasseth the compass of our minds.

3. God is infinite and consequently incomprehensible, in regard of time or duration: He is eternal. But of this I shall speak afterward.

I proceed to apply this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction. Is it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible, so that he cannot be found out unto perfection? Then we may hence be instructed in these things.

Instr. 1. Here we may see the reason why God speaks of himself to us in the holy scriptures under borrowed terms and expressions. No mind can conceive, much less can any words express what he is in himself. And such is our weakness and incapacity, that if God should speak to us of himself as he is, our understanding could not reach it; all would be but dark sayings, hid from the understandings of all living. Therefore God tempers the declarations of himself to our weakness, and condescends to our narrowness, in representing himself to us by certain similitudes borrowed from the creatures, and setting forth his divine perfections by such excellencies as are to be found in the things he hath made. As the light of the sun would dazzle our weak eyes, if it were not tempered by the air and vapours, through which it diffuseth itself to our senses: So the direct and immediate beams of God's incomprehensible majesty would stupify and overwhelm us. We are not able to conceive of him as he is in himself; therefore he ushers himself into our minds by dark shadows, and useth such expressions of his nature and perfections as are suited to our capacity, and thereby tempers the declarations of himself to our weakness: Like a kind father, he stammers with his stammering children, and speaks to us in our own dialect.

Instr. 2. Is it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible? Then he hath not a body and bodily parts. Being a most pure and simple substance, free from all mixture and composition, we must needs have a higher conception of him, than to clog him with any matter, though of a finer temper than ours. This is that which is intended, when
God

God is called a Spirit. John iv. 24. It is to be understood, not so much by way of affirmation, as by way of negation. He is a Spirit; that is, he is not a body; he is wholly separate from any thing of flesh and matter; nor doth he consist of various parts extended one without and beyond another. He is not a Spirit so as angels and souls of men are, but infinitely higher. As he exceeds all in the nature of being, so he exceeds all in the nature of spirit: So that we must apprehend him above any spirit. But we call him a Spirit, and he calls himself so, because there is not among men any other term of excellency to express him by. Spirit is the highest excellency in us; therefore it is transferred to God in honour *

Spiritual substances are more excellent than bodily: Therefore God being the most excellent Substance, he must needs be entirely remote from the condition of a body. And the effects of his power, wisdom and goodness, are so admirable, that they do plainly shew him to be a more perfect and eminent Being than can possibly come under a bodily shape. It is true, under the old Testament, God did sometimes manifest himself in a bodily shape; or we may say that the Son of God did sometimes appear in a human assumed body or bodily shape, as a prelude of his incarnation: But in such instances, the substance of God was no more seen, than the substance of angels was in their apparitions unto men. And although bodily parts or members, such as eyes, mouth, hands, are oft-times attributed to God in scripture; yet that is done in condescension to our weakness, that we may the more easily conceive of him by such resemblances. Such representations are intended to signify the acts of God, as they bear some resemblance to these acts which we perform by such members as he is pleased, for our sake, to ascribe unto himself. Therefore we must not conceive of God according to the letter of such expressions, but according to the true intent and design of them.

Instr. 3. Is it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible? Then we cannot frame any image or picture of him, as in the Romish church they pretend to do, by picturing God in their temples in the shape of an old man †.

But

* *Nec enim Deus ipsa qui intelligitur a nobis alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens quædam soluta & libera, segregata a omni concretionem mortali.* Cic.

† *Nulla autem effigies, nulli commissa metallo*

Forma Dei; mentes habitare & pectora gaudet. Stat. 12. Theb.

But it plainly follows, from the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility, that to frame any image or picture of God, is unreasonable, impossible and dishonourable to him. 1. It is unreasonable. How unreasonable is it to think to fashion with our hands, whom we cannot see with our eyes, nor comprehend with our minds? Some heathens have been more rational in this matter than some pretended Christians. Pythagoras forbade his scholars to engrave any shape of God on a ring, because he was not to be comprehended by sense. God did expressly forbid the *Children of Israel* to make any *similitude* of him, whether in the shape of a man, or in the shape of any other creature (n): And he urgeth the same by this argument, *that they saw no manner of similitude in Horeb*. When God discovered his glory in Horeb, the people were ready to *break through to gaze* (o). Probably they were curious to have seen some similitude of God, that they might know how to make an image of him, which therefore he was the more careful to prevent. And how often doth the Lord, by the prophets, declare his indignation against the representing him by any image? As in that text, *To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him* (p)? God is infinitely above any image or picture; therefore it is monstrous and brutish stupidity to think to represent him by any. 2. It is impossible. For, if our souls cannot grasp his nature, how can our hands frame his image? Of the two, it is more possible to comprehend him in our minds, than to frame him in an image to our senses. There is no proportion in nature, between an infinite, immense, and incomprehensible Being, and a finite, limited and visible shape. 3. It is most dishonourable to God. It is most unworthy of him; a disgrace to his incomprehensible nature. It is to render him no better than a carnal corruptible being, and tends to debase mens apprehensions of him, and to impair the reverence of him in their minds. It is a disgrace to his pure spiritual nature.

Instr. 4. Is it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible? Then there is an unseen evil in sin; more evil than any man ever knew or saw. Certainly the evil of sin must be infinite, incomprehensible, and inconceivable, in regard of the object against whom it is committed. An injury, which being done to an ordinary man, is but a breach of

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good

(n) Deut. iv. 15, 16, 17, 18. (o) Exod. xix. 21. (p) Isa. xl. 18.

good behaviour, may be high treason, if done against a king or prince. The dignity and excellency of the object doth exceedingly aggravate the offence. O then, of what a horrid nature must sin be, seeing it is an offence and injury done, not to earthly kings and princes, nor to glorious angels, but to an incomprehensible Majesty who *cannot be found out unto perfection*? The venom and malignity of sin must needs be inconceivably great; because God, who is offended, wronged and dishonoured by it, is inconceivably excellent, infinitely above all that we can speak or think. And upon this ground, I can aver, that there is more evil in the least sin, than can be conceived or comprehended by all angels and men. In heaven, when the saints shall *see God face to face, and know him as they are known of him*, then they shall have more full and clear apprehensions of the evil of sin, than they can have now, which will greatly heighten their joy and thankfulness, and admiration of divine grace: Yet even then shall they not be able to comprehend the great evil that is in sin; because their most enlarged capacity will not be large enough, to comprehend the matchless excellency and glorious perfections of God, who was offended and dishonoured by it. O then, never entertain slight thoughts of sin any more.

S E R M O N XIII.

Instr. 5. **I**S it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible? Then, a silent and seeing ignorance of God, is our highest knowledge of him. You may perceive, that I speak not of a gross ignorance of what God hath revealed of himself: In this many please themselves to their eternal ruin. But my meaning is, when men apply themselves seriously to study the knowledge of God, as he hath revealed and made himself known; and the more they study to know him, the more they see their own ignorance of him, and silently and quietly admire this unsearchable depth of all perfection: This, I say, is our highest knowledge of God. Therefore such as are best acquainted with God, do most lament and bewail their ignorance of him: As the psalmist, *So foolish was I and ignorant* (a), says he; and wise Agur, *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man, &c* (b). As they that know least of God, are least sensible of their ignorance;

(a) Psal. lxxiii. 22.

(b) Prov. xxx. 2.

ignorance; so they that know him best, do most bewail their own blindness. When the light of the knowledge of God breaks in upon your heart, the darkness of your ignorance will be more manifested by it, and your knowledge will disappear in the glorious appearance of this light. Upon every new discovery of God, this will more clearly appear, that he is still further from your knowledge than ever you conceived him to be. It is the first point and degree of the true knowledge of God, to discern our own ignorance of him, and to find him to be above all knowledge: And they are the greatest proficients in the knowledge of God; who grow most in a believing, humbling, and admiring ignorance of him.

Use 2. For reproof. To two sorts of persons.

Repr. 1. Here is ground of reproof to them that are conceited of their knowledge of God, and boast of it, as if they knew enough, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds. I am afraid, that some among you are puffed up with a conceit of your knowledge, as if you knew God well enough. But this is a sad evil. For, 1. It is most dishonourable to God. What mean thoughts must you have of his incomprehensible majesty who are conceited of your knowledge of him, as if you could fathom this bottomless depth! 2. Such a conceit is wholly groundless and unreasonable. For, seeing God is unsearchable and incomprehensible by any created understanding, therefore all that you know of God must be inconceivably less than what you are ignorant of. O how little do even the best know of God! 3. Such a conceit is an argument of your ignorance: For it the most ignorant that are most apt to boast of their knowledge. Hence the apostle tells us, *If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know (c)*. They that know least of God, are conceited that they know most. 4. A conceit of your knowledge makes you negligent in the use of means. Hence our Lord says to the Pharisees, *Now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth (d)*. The conceit they had of their knowledge made them still go on in their ignorance, and slight the cure and remedy.

Repr. 2. Here is also ground of reproof to them that search curiously into the Divine Essence, as if by searching they could find out God unto perfection. Ever since the fall, a vain curiosity possesseth the minds of men, so that naturally they have an itching desire to know what God would not have

(c) 1 Cor. viii. 2.

(d) John ix. 41.

have them to know. Vain men nauseate and despise what is revealed, as trite and vulgar, cheap and low : And hence they *boldly intrude into things that they have not seen* (e), and would be *wise above what is written* (f) ; enquiring curiously into things above their reach, and prying into things too high for them ; which Cyril calls, *the domineerings or darings of bold spirits* †. Particularly, mens curiosity doth oft-times lead them to pry into the nature of God further than he hath revealed, and above their capacity to search out and discover. Hence it is that the schoolmen multiply curious and unedifying questions, and subtle inquiries, concerning God and the Divine Essence, as if they could unfold all the mysteries and riddles of the Deity. And even the saints themselves have sometimes been too curious in their requests and enquiries concerning God, as desiring to pry too far into his majesty. That question proposed by Moses, seems to have had somewhat of curiosity in it ; *If the children of Israel say to me, What is his name, what shall I say unto them* (g) ? As also that prayer he put up, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory* (h). Perhaps, there was in his prayer some mixture of human infirmity, as desiring to pry into the essence of God. Something of this discovered itself in Philip also : For, when our blessed Lord had told his disciples, that they *knew the Father, and had seen him*, Philip says, *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us* (i). He was not satisfied with seeing the Father by faith and in Christ, but desired to see and know him in a way of his own.

This curious searching and inquiring into the divine essence, ariseth often from an ambition to be accounted wise, and to be highly esteemed among men, as having a knowledge estranged from the common mass of mankind. But it is a very great evil. For,

1. It is unnecessary : For, God hath revealed so much of himself as is good for us, and needful for us to know ; and I may say, as much as we are capable of knowing in this imperfect state. Blessed be God, we are not left to seek our salvation, in curious and obscure questions, and nice and subtle inquiries. In these we may safely be ignorant.

2. Such curiosity is vain and fruitless : For God will not satisfy it. As I said, Moses's question seems to be too curious, *What is thy name* (k) ? Therefore God gives a dark answer,

† τῶν τολμηρῶν Κυρίοτητα.

(e) Col. ii. 18. (f) 1 Cor. iv. 6. (g) Exod. iii. 13.
(h) Exod. xxxiii. 18. (i) John xiv. 7, 8. (k) Exod. iii. 13, 14.

swer, to confound vain and presumptuous mortality: *I AM THAT I AM*. An answer that doth not satisfy curiosity, though it be enough to satisfy and quiet faith and sobriety. And to his prayer, *Shew me thy glory*, the Lord answers, *thou shalt see my backparts, but my face shall not be seen* (l). Probably Moses had desired to see his face, to pry into his essence: No, says the Lord, thou shalt see no more but *my backparts*. God will not satisfy the curiosity of men, were they as dear to him as ever Moses was.

3. Such curiosity † is sinful. For, 1. It is that which God hath forbidden. We must not seek to be *wise above what is written* (m). When God discovered his glory to the Israelites, in giving the law, he commanded to *set bounds to the people*, that they might not be too busily inquisitive: And they are forbidden to *break through unto the Lord to gaze* (n). God would not allow them to gratify their curiosity. They might see at a distance, but not come so near as *to gaze*: Importing that, in divine things, we must not covet to know more than God would have us to know. Men that desire to pry into the divine essence, need that admonition, that they *break not through to gaze*, *Draw not near hither* (o), says the Lord to Moses, when he appeared in the burning bush: Come not so near as to pry. 2. It is unaccountable boldness and presumption. *Wherefore is it that thou askest after my name* (p), says the Lord to Jacob: Importing that it is a high presumption and daring boldness, to search such a mystery that is out of the reach of all created capacities. God's incomprehensible majesty sets him above all our bold and curious inquiries. Shall we, who are poor finite shallow creatures, presume to measure an incomprehensible Majesty by our understanding? Shall we presume to empty the ocean of God's infiniteness, by the poor shell of our finite capacity? What intolerable boldness is it, to attempt to fathom that bottomless ocean of all perfection! 3. It is most dishonourable to God: For, *first*, It is a tacit accusing him of envy, as the serpent did to our first parents; as if God gave but imperfect discoveries of himself, because he envies us an intellectual happiness. *Second*, It is to intrench upon his infinite wisdom and sovereignty, when we intrude, and would be *wise above*

(l) Exod xxxiii. 23.

† *Curiositas reum efficit, bon peritum.* Zeno Serm. 2 de ætern. Filij Gener.

(m) 1 Cor iv. 6. (n) Exod. xix. 12, 21. (o) Exod. iii. 5. (p) Gen. xxxii. 29.

above what is written; as if he were not competent judge what is fit to be revealed, or meet for us to know.

4. This curiosity is pernicious. For, 1. It hinders, yea, ruins true knowledge. By prying into that which God would not have us to know, we come short of that which otherwise we might be capable of knowing. Curious inquiries concerning God are, as an ancient says †, *the disease of the soul*. While men think to strengthen, they crack their brains; as the fly, by approaching too near the candle, loseth both its eyes and its wings. God turns mens aspiring wisdom into folly. All bold and curious inquiries, are like gazing upon the sun, where, instead of greater quickness of sight, we meet with blindness. 2. Such curious inquiries are the snare of the devil, to take men off from all serious religion: For, by these, he devours their time, eats up their strength, and diverts their minds; so that the important business of serious religion lies by as a neglected thing. 3. By these the devil leads men into error. Nothing humours curious minds but novelties and rarities. At this day novelty and rarity are the two properties that commend doctrines to wanton palates; and the devil is not wanting to please and gratify them with variety of new opinions and nice notions, that lead them into error. 4. Such curious inquiries expose men to wrath. It was a curious desire of hidden knowledge that ruined our first parents. *Let them not break through to gaze*, says the Lord, *lest the Lord break forth upon them, and many of them perish* (q). The Bethshemites paid dear for their presumption, in prying into the ark. It is at our peril, if we break through the bounds that God had set, and intrude upon that which he hath not allowed us ‡. God hates the curious.

Use 3. For caution. Though God be incomprehensible, yet we should not give over the study of the knowledge of him. Though we cannot comprehend him, nor find him out unto perfection; yet this will not excuse mens sloth and negligence, as if it were in vain to study to know him. We must not sit down where we are, because we cannot go so far as we would. As we should labour to

know

† τῆς ψυχῆς νόσος ἐστὶ τὸ κακῶς καὶ περισπῶς ζῆτεῖν περὶ Θεοῦ.
(q) Exod. xix. 21, 24. Basil.

‡ To one that asked many things concerning the gods, Euclid answered, *Cetera quidem nescio, illud scio quid odere curiosos.*

Maxim. Serm. 21.

know the love of Christ, though it be so vast and boundless that it *passeth knowledge* (r): So should we labour to know God, though he pass all created understandings. We should study to know the greatness of his power, love, mercy, &c. though his greatness in all these be such as our narrow hearts cannot comprehend. We should aim at and endeavour after perfection in the knowledge of God, as well as in grace, though we cannot attain to either.

For clearing this, consider that there is some knowledge of God attainable in this life, though not a perfect nor comprehensive knowledge. Though he cannot be known as he is in himself, yet he may be known so far as is needful for our salvation and comfort †. You may know him, so far as concerns your duty to him, and your happiness in him. You may know him, so far, as out of love to him, and fear of him, to worship and serve him; and so far as to admire and adore his incomprehensible majesty, and to see that there is no happiness but in the enjoyment of him. This is all the knowledge of God that is promised in this life, and all we can attain unto. And even with respect to this knowledge, none know so much of God, but they may know more, and know him better, and to better purpose. And though we cannot know all of God, yet we are bound to study all that may be known.

Well then, let not the consideration of God's incomprehensibility discourage you in studying the knowledge of him. It must not quench your endeavours, but regulate them, and keep them in compass. You must not lie by, but press earnestly after the knowledge of God, as he hath revealed himself. And let all your inquiries after the knowledge of God bear a special relation to this end, that you may fear, reverence, and adore his glorious majesty, and that you may worship and serve him, and your hearts may go out after him as a matchless and incomparable portion. Whatever you know of God is but a vain speculation, if it hath no tendency this way.

Use 4. For exhortation. Is it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible? Then let me hence exhort you to several duties.

Exhort. 1. Let us dwell upon the study and contemplation of this incomprehensible Majesty, with much humble sobriety

(r) Eph. iii. 19.

† *Qui pie infinita prosequitur, etsi non contingat aliquando, tamen proficiet prodeundo.* Hillar. de Trin. L. 2.

sobriety and modesty. To engage you to this I propose these considerations. 1. Consider the infinite distance between God and us. So did Abraham; *I have taken upon me*, says he, *to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes* (s). There is not so great a distance between the most glorious angel and a pile of grass, as between the incomprehensible God and sinful dust. Therefore, as the preacher says on another occasion, *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God* (t): So here, be not rash in your inquiries concerning God, nor hasty in forming your conceptions of him; *for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity* (u). You are poor finite creatures of shallow capacities: O, with what sobriety should you search after the knowledge of him who is infinitely above you! What poor drops, what pitiful nothings are you in comparison of him? 2. Consider how little of the knowledge of God we are capable of in this present state. There is a dark cloud upon the minds even of the best saints in this life. Our eyes, by reason of the beam of sin in them, are as the eyes of an owl before the sun. Though Paul was privileged with extraordinary revelations, yet he pretended to no higher knowledge of God than *in a glass*, and that not clearly, but *darkly* (x). 3. Consider what danger there is of wrong notions of this incomprehensible God. *If there be † danger in speaking of God, even the things that are true*, there must be danger also in studying and contemplating his majesty, lest we search too far into this mystery, that is so far above us, and remote from our understanding. How easily may we be mistaken, and offend and dishonour God, and so meet with such a challenge as that, *Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right* (y): You have not thought or conceived worthily of me. It is certainly our interest to be soberly wise in searching after the knowledge of this incomprehensible Majesty ‡.

But it may be enquired, wherein must our sobriety and modesty appear in studying and contemplating the majesty of God? I answer, it must be exercised in these things. 1.
Study

(s) Gen. xviii. 27. (t) Eccl. v. 2. (u) Isa. xl. 17. (x) 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

† *De Deo etiam vera dicere periculosum est.* Cyr.

(y) Job xlii. 7.

‡ *Nihil de Deo, quod non licet, queras; de Deo nihil dicas, quod non didiceris a Deo.* Sextus Pythagor.

Study the knowledge of God with a deep humbling sense of your blindness and ignorance, and humbly own and acknowledge the same before God. As Agur did, *Surely, says he, I am more brutish than any man, and have not the knowledge of a man: I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy (z).* Of all men God takes the meek and humble sinner for his scholar: *The meek will be guide in judgment; the meek will be teach his way (a).* Therefore be even as a weaned child (b). Be denied to your own wit, and submit your reason to divine revelation. 2. In studying the knowledge of God, entertain a deep reverence of his majesty. Sanctify him in your hearts. For he will be sanctified in them that come nigh him (c). Reverence and adore him, as being infinitely above the understanding of men and angels. Even the glorious angels cover their faces (d) before him, out of a profound reverence. 3. Dwell upon the study and contemplation of God with much holy fear and trembling; lest you dishonour him by wrong notions and apprehensions of his majesty, or be guilty of prying too far into his incomprehensible nature. O what need is there of holy fear, considering how far God is above you, and what corrupt, vain, and foolish hearts you have! 4. Keep close to the written word. We may learn much of God from his works, but much more from his word. There he hath more fully and clearly revealed himself. Therefore rest satisfied with what God hath revealed of himself, without prying curiously into his incomprehensible nature. Seek not to be wise above what is written. There is enough in the written word to take up your time and study, though you do not pry into things too deep for you *. 5. In studying the knowledge of God, exercise a humble, self-denied and believing dependence on Christ. Put him upon the exercise of his prophetic office: *For no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him (e).* It is Christ that must reveal God unto you. *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (f).* The apostle ascribes the saving knowledge of God that he and

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(z) Prov. xxx. 2, 3. (a) Psal. xxv. 9. (b) Psal. cxxxi. 2.
(c) Lev. x. 3. (d) Isa. vi. 2.

* *Quæ Deus occulta esse voluit, non sunt scrutanda; quæ tamen manifesta fecit non sunt negligenda: Ne in illis illicite curiosi, & in his damnabiliter inveniamur ingrati.* Prosp. de Voc. Gent.

(e) Matth. xi. 27. (f) John i. 18.

other believers had to Jesus Christ as the author: *The Son of God*, says he, *hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true* (g). He is *made of God to us wisdom* (h). Therefore, under the deep humbling sense of the darkness and blindness of your minds, depend on him for the light of his Spirit, that *in his light you may see light* (i). 6. Humbly address yourselves to God in prayer. You study God best, when you study on your knees. You need an internal illumination, as well as an external revelation: And you must have that from God †. *There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding* (k). Pray that he would open your eyes, and shine into your heart. Pray for *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him* (l).

S E R M O N XIV.

Exhort. 2. **T**AKE heed what conceptions you have of this incomprehensible Majesty. You need to advert to this; and to engage you to it, I propose these considerations.

1. We cannot have an adequate suitable conception of God: Else his nature being infinite, our conceptions of him must be so also. Imagination will go very far: Yet all our imaginations cannot represent to us a full notion of God's incomprehensible nature. We cannot conceive what God is in himself: And this needs not seem strange, seeing he dwells in light inaccessible. Yet,

2. It is necessary that we have some right conception of God. Without this, we cannot fear, love, serve or worship him. Without right conceptions of God, our services are profane, customary and irreligious: We *worship we know not what* (a). Our thoughts in duty are lost and scattered, unless we settle them on some right notions of God. Unless we have right conceptions of him in duty, we do not worship him, but an idol.

3. We

(g) 1 John v. 10. (h) 1 Cor. i. 30. (i) Psal. xxxvi. 9.

† *Bernardus omnes suas literas in silvis & in agris didicit, non hominum magisterie, sed meditando & orando.* Petrarch. Lib. 2. Dialog. 40.

(k) Job xxxii. 8. Psal. xix. 8. 2 Cor. iv. 6. (l) Eph. i. 17. (a) John iv. 22.

3. We may have true conceptions of God, though not full and adequate conceptions. Though we cannot conceive *what God is* in himself, yet we can conceive *that he is*, that he hath a true and real essence; and we may conceive *what he is not*, that he is not finite, changeable, visible, or material; and we have some positive conceptions of his attributes, his wisdom, power, holiness, and other perfections. Now, these are true conceptions of God, though not commensurate to his nature. As we truly see the vast ocean, though we cannot see how vast and deep it is; and we truly touch a mountain, though we do not lay our hand upon the whole of it, nor grasp it in our arms: So, we truly conceive God to be omnipotent, immense, &c. though we cannot comprehend his power and immensity. There is a great difference between a false and a weak conception. Our simple coming short of such notions and conceptions as are fully suitable to God's incomprehensible nature, is our weakness, not our sin. Even the glorious angels come infinitely short of adequate conceptions of his incomprehensible majesty; yet it cannot be denied that they have true and right conceptions of him.

4. It is very hard for us to attain to any right and becoming conceptions of God. And that, 1. Because of his infinite and incomprehensible nature. No bounds can be set to terminate his excellency. 2. Because of our weakness and incapacity. With respect to this, it is said, *He maketh darkness his secret place; and clouds and darkness are round about him* (b). 3. Because of the corruption of our nature. We have such bad hearts, that it is hard for us to win to any such thoughts of God as are worthy of him. I say then, upon all these accounts, there is great danger of erring, when we go about to establish a right notion of God. We poor sinful creatures are at a loss how to form proper thoughts of him. Yet,

5. We should endeavour to have as high and becoming thoughts of God as we can. Seeing we cannot have a full notion of him, we should endeavour to make it as high and as pure as can be. It is our sin to rest in mean and low thoughts of God. We should endeavour to have right conceptions of him, and to ascend as high as our capacity will allow. And though our weakness is such that we shall still come far short, God being infinitely above our choicest thoughts and conceptions of him; yet when we singly endeavour,

(b) Psal. xviii. 11. Psal. xcvi. 2.

deavour, through grace, to have as high thoughts of God as we can, our coming short will not be charged against us as our sin.

But what shall we do that we may attain to right conceptions of God? This may be matter of serious exercise to tender Christians: Seeing God is incomprehensible, infinitely above the conceptions of men and angels, how then shall we poor finite creatures form any right thoughts of God? I give these following directions.

1. Beware of all such thoughts and conceptions of God as are dishonourable to him; all debasing conceptions that are unworthy of him. Such are called, in the heathens, *vain imaginations*. They *became vain in their imaginations (c)*. They did not think of God according to the dignity of a Deity. Vain imaginations of God are very natural to us. Men are apt to dress up a God according to their own humours, and to ascribe to him what is grateful to them, though never so base. They think that God is altogether *such an one as themselves (d)*. Though we cannot comprehend *what he is*, yet we must not fancy him to be *what he is not*. Take heed of all such thoughts as diminish his glory, and set him below the dignity of his nature. Remember that he is a *jealous God*, very sensible of the least disgrace. Wrong notions of God, and low apprehensions of him, will pollute your worship.

2. More particularly, take heed of a carnal notion or representation of God in your minds. As there are external idols, so there are mental idols: When men conceive of God as having a bodily form, or fancy him according to the shape and fashion of some visible substance; as of an old man sitting in heaven, or the like. This is very natural to us. We that converse so much with material and sensible objects, are very prone to conceive of God according to these things about which we are conversant. Images of God are so natural to us, that we can hardly dispossess our minds of them. And by this means external idolatry had its first rise. The apostle testifies concerning the Gentiles, that *becoming vain in their imaginations, they changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, &c (e)*. But this is most dishonourable to God. Carnal representations of God in the mind, are as ridiculous in themselves, and as injurious to God, as an external image or statue. They tend to

(c) Rom. i. 21. (d) Psal. l. 21. (e) Rom. i. 21, 23.

to debase his nature, and render him contemptible. When such representations come into our minds, and are entertained there, this is to limit an infinite essence, to measure his incomprehensible nature, and to detract from his supereminent excellency. And certainly he that hath forbidden images of him in the church, doth also forbid them in our minds.

3. Form all your conceptions of God according to his word, and the revelation he hath given of himself. It will be the happiness of the saints in heaven to see God *as he is*; here we can see him, only as he is pleased to reveal and make himself known to us. And this way is most easy, safe, and profitable: For, though these representations God makes of himself in his word, are but imperfect notions, and not every way proportionable to his incomprehensible nature; yet they are enough to beget love, fear, admiration, and reverence. When Moses desired to see *his glory*, God did only proclaim *his name*: He *passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful, and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, &c (f)*. So that these are the conceptions we must have of God, that he is *merciful, gracious, long-suffering, &c*. We draw a snare upon ourselves, when we would go higher than the written word. To see *his face* is the happiness of heaven; all we can do now, and as much as we can aspire unto, is to look upon his *back-parts*. Only conceive that these attributes are in God in an infinite manner: And look on all these perfections as they shine forth and discover themselves *in the face of Christ (g)*; that is, in his person as God-man: For, in him we have the clearest, fullest, and most delightful manifestation of the divine perfections, that ever was or shall be in this world. The attributes of God are contemperated in Christ to our faith, love and contemplation.

4. Use earthly similitudes and resemblances, as helps and arguments, rather than representations. In the holy scriptures God doth often speak of himself under similitudes borrowed from the creatures: As when he attributes to himself, either bodily members, *as eyes, mouth, hands*; or the actions of creatures, such as *sitting, walking, flying*. So also, he shadows forth himself, sometimes under the resemblances of a *rock, shelter, light, &c*. And sometimes under the relations of a *friend, father, husband, &c*. Now, these are notions suited, not so much to the nature of God, as to the weakness of man, and therefore ought not to be our formal conceptions

(f) Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. (g) 2 Cor. iv. 6.

conceptions of him. But, 1. We are to use them as helps in our meditations and conceptions of God. Such is our weakness, that we cannot rightly conceive of God, without the help of such resemblances; therefore we are thereby to assist ourselves in our apprehensions of him. We are not to rest in such conceptions of him, but to take our rise from these perfections and excellencies that are in the creatures, and mount up by degrees to a knowledge of God's nature by these several helps, and conceive of him by these divided excellencies, because we cannot conceive of him in the simplicity of his own being and his undivided essence. 2. We are to use them as arguments, whereby to reason ourselves into some suitable and becoming conceptions of God. So, when God resembles himself to a loving *father* or tender-hearted *mother* (*b*), argue thus, O, there is no father or mother like God; if earthly parents have such a tender love to, and care of their children, then the love and care of God toward his own must be inconceivably great. Again, if such and such excellencies are to be found in the creatures, then there must be infinitely more in God.

5. Learn to refine, spiritualize, and elevate, all your notions and conceptions of God. Even when you endeavour to frame the highest notions of God, there will be some similitude of some corporeal thing in your fancy: Therefore what is offered to your fancy, should be purified by your reason. Endeavour to refine every representation of God, by separating therefrom, in your conception, whatever is unworthy of him. Labour to have your apprehensions still more purified, and to rise higher and higher in your conceptions of him. Remember, whatever God is, he is infinitely so. Conceive of him, as excellent, without any imperfection; as great, without quantity; as perfect, without quality; as every where, without place; as powerful, without members; as wise, without reasoning; as light, without darkness. And when you have risen to the highest, conceive him to be yet infinitely above all that you can conceive of him, and humbly acknowledge the weakness and infirmity of your own minds. Say, with respect to the highest and purest conception you can attain to, "This is not God: " God is infinitely more than this: If I could conceive him, " then he were not God; for he is incomprehensibly above " all that I can think or conceive of him."

Exhort. 3. Is it so, that God is incomprehensible? This teacheth

(*b*) Psal. ciii. 13. Isa. xlix. 15.

teacheth you to acquiesce in his dispensations, without murmuring, or disputing, or calling him to an account, or censuring him in any of his ways. As God cannot be fully known in his nature, so neither in his ways or works. *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out (i)?* There is something inaccessible to us in his works, as well as in his nature. There are *secrets of wisdom (k)* above our reach. God were not unsearchable and incomprehensible, if the reasons of all his ways and actings were obvious to our shallow capacity. Therefore let us sit down in silence, and acquiesce in his proceedings, and not censure what we cannot comprehend. This is Elihu's scope; *Behold, says he, God is great, and we know him not (l)*: Therefore, do not complain or dispute about God's dealings with you or his church. And again, *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: He is excellent in power, and in judgment (m)*. There are some dark providences, the meaning whereof is hid from us, who are poor short-sighted creatures. We may sooner fathom the deepest part of the sea, than understand the ways of his incomprehensible majesty with our shallow brains. We have not heads to understand the reasons and methods of his government. *No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end (n)*. It is not the face, but the back-parts of Providence, that we behold: Therefore it is high presumption for us, to judge or censure any of the ways of God.

So it is also in God's dispensations of grace. There are such mazes and mysteries there, as we cannot find out: As, why he dispenseth grace and mercy to such sinners, rather than to others; why he acteth so variously in the means, manner, and time of conversion; and in dispensing his gifts, graces, and comforts, to some more, to others less. It is true, these are among the depths of divine sovereignty: Yet sovereignty never acts separately from infinite wisdom. God hath infinitely wise reasons for all that he doth: But his reasons are unsearchable by us. The rays of his infinite wisdom are too bright and dazzling for our weakness; and the secrets of his wisdom are too deep for us to wade into: Therefore let us silently reverence and adore his way.

Exhort 4. Improve the consideration of God's incomprehensibility to promote humility. And, 1. O what poor nothings are we in comparison of him! The consideration of

(i) Rom. xi. 33.

(k) Job xi. 6.

(l) Job xxxvi. 26.

(m) Job xxxvii. 23.

(n) Eccl. iii. 11.

of his incomprehensibility should make us appear little in our own eyes. O what a vast disproportion is there between him and us! What little little things are we to God? Even less than an atom in the beams of the sun; poor drops to that ocean of all perfection: Yea, *all nations before him are as nothing* (o). 2. It is also a humbling consideration, that we are capable to know and understand so little of God. This should beat down the pride even of those that excel others in knowledge. O, how small a portion do you know of him, not only by reason of his incomprehensibility, but also by reason of your own blindness and incapacity? All that are savingly enlightened go mourning to their graves, that they know so little of God. How did Agur lament this (p)?

Exhort. 5. The consideration of God's incomprehensibility, should engage us in a holy admiration of his Majesty. You should be struck with wonder and amazement, at his matchless being, and boundless excellency and perfection. Nothing is more present than God, and yet nothing more hid. He is light and yet obscurity. His perfections are visible, and yet unsearchable. O how wonderful is he! We admire the brightness of the sun the more, because we cannot look upon it without winking. So here, let us admire him whom we cannot comprehend, and cry out, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods! who is like thee* (q)! His name is *wonderful* (r). Whenever any thing of God is seen, he is seen a *wonder*: So that it is a wonder indeed that he is not more wondered at. A silent and amazing admiration of him, is a silent commendation of him, and is almost all the worship we can give him.

Exhort. 6. God's incomprehensibility calls for holy reverence and adoration. God is clothed with unspeakable and incomprehensible majesty. O that this may imprint on our hearts an awful respect to him. Live under a constant awe and reverence of him, especially when you draw near to him in worship: For he *will be sanctified in them that come nigh him* (s). Even the glorious angels *cover their faces* (t) before him: O then, with what holy awe should creeping worms come into his presence? Let us entertain high conceptions of God. The higher apprehensions you have of him, the greater awe and reverence will be upon your hearts in his presence.

Exhort. 7.

(o) Isa. xl. 17. (p) Prov. xxx. 2, 3. (q) Exod. xv. 11.
(r) Judges xiii. 18. (s) Lev. x. 3. (t) Isa. vi. 2.

Exhort. 7. This doctrine serves to direct us with what frame we should approach to God in his worship. We should worship him with these boundless affections that bear upon them some shadow or image of his incomprehensible nature; such as raised affections, and vast and enlarged desires, which know no limits. Under the law, no creeping thing was to be offered in sacrifice to God. It is a great contempt of his incomprehensible Majesty, when we come before him with a slight creeping frame; as if any thing, though never so mean, were good enough for him. We, poor shallow creatures, can never give enough to that boundless ocean of all perfection: Therefore, let us give all that we can, and endeavour to screw up our affections to the highest pitch in his service. We cannot give him a worship proportionable to his incomprehensible Majesty, tho' our hearts did swell as large as heaven in our desires after him in every duty. Therefore, in all our worship, let us nourish right conceptions of God. Let our thoughts of him be high and reverend. Let us consider that we draw near to him who is infinitely above the conceptions of angels and men, and dwells in inaccessible light, and is therefore worthy of infinite honour, and merits our highest affections. Low thoughts of God will sink our spirits in a low frame before him.

Exhort. 8. Let believers in Christ long to be in heaven: For although, even there, you can have no comprehensive knowledge of God, yet your knowledge of him will then be perfected; for then, the capacity of your soul will be enlarged to a very vast comprehension, and God will then more fully discover and manifest himself. O then, long for that blessed state. A sight of his blessed face shall then make us completely happy.

DISCOURSE IV.

Of God's Knowledge.

SERMON XV.

1 Sam. ii. 3. *The Lord is a God of knowledge.*

MY next work shall be to speak of some of the divine attributes, where I shall have occasion to shew that God is infinite and incomprehensible in every one of them. I begin with God's knowledge, from the text I have read.

These words are a part of Hannah's song of thanksgiving to God for her son Samuel. Having expressed her great joy in the Lord, and the grounds thereof, she, in the next place, admonisheth her own and the church's adversaries, to forbear their insolent and arrogant taunts and reproaches. And this she urgeth, in my text, by an argument taken from God's accurate and exact knowledge of all mens' actions and behaviour: *For, says she, the Lord is a God of knowledge.* As if she had said, He exactly knows all your pride and contempt, and perverse carriage towards me and others of his people. The expression hath a great emphasis in it, and imports the greatness and vastness of his knowledge. As Christ is called *a man of sorrows* (a), to express the greatness of his sorrow, as if he had been made up of sorrow: So God is here called *a God of knowledge*, as if he were wholly and only knowledge; because he is all eye, all understanding, perfect in knowledge. The word, in the original, is in the plural number, *a God of KNOWLEDGES*; that is, of all kinds of knowledge. He is perfect in all knowledges. All things fall under his knowledge. He knows what men and angels know, and infinitely more. He is understanding above understanding, mind above mind; the mind of minds, and the light of lights.

The doctrine I propose is this:

God hath an infinite and perfect knowledge.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall,

1. *Prove that a perfect knowledge belongs unto God.*

2. *Shew*

(a) Isa. liii. 2,

2. *Shew what God's knowledge is, and in what sense knowledge is attributed to him.*
3. *Shew what are the objects of God's knowledge.*
4. *Speak of the manner of his knowledge.*
5. *Make application of the doctrine.*

First, I prove that a perfect knowledge belongs unto God. Knowledge is frequently attributed unto God in scripture. The holy scriptures hold forth God's perfect knowledge three ways.

1. Affirmatively or positively; when it is said, that *he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven (b)*: And that *his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings (c)*. And the psalmist thus expresses himself in prayer, *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassedst my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways, &c (d)*. And the apostle tells us, *all things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do (e)*. I might multiply texts of scripture to this purpose. Hence he is said to be *perfect in knowledge (f)*. He is absolutely perfect in it. Nothing can be added to his knowledge. It can admit of no imaginable increase. Therefore the apostle breaks out into an admiration of God's abundant knowledge; *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (g)*.

2. Negatively; when it denies any thing to be hid from God. *I know*, says Job, *that no thought can be withholden from thee (h)*. And Elihu tells us, *There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves (i)*. Agreeable whereunto is that of the apostle, *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight (k)*. Again, the holy scripture denies of God, or removes from him, these imperfections that knowledge in us is attended with. *His understanding is infinite (l)*, says the psalmist. It is not finite, as ours is. Or, as the words may be rendered, *There is no number or account of his understanding*: There is no end of it: It hath no measure, bounds or limits, as our understanding hath. *There is no searching of his understanding (m)*.

3. Figuratively

(b) Job xxviii. 24. (c) Job xxxiv. 21. (d) Psal. cxxxix. 1—5.
(e) Heb. iv. 13. (f) Job xxxvii. 16. (g) Rom. xi. 33. (h) Job xlii. 2. (i) Job xxxiv. 22. (k) Heb. iv. 13. (l) Psal. cxlvii. 5.
(m) Isa. xl. 28.

3. Figuratively and metaphorically; as when God is resembled to pure light. *God is light*, says the apostle, and in him is no darkness at all (n). And when the scripture attributes to God eyes and ears, and the senses of seeing and hearing. So it is said, *The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth. His eyes behold, his eye-lids try the children of men. You have wept in the ears of the Lord* (o). Not that God hath eyes and ears properly, as we have; but because these are the senses whereby we have the most clear and certain knowledge of things, therefore they are attributed to God, to signify his most clear and perfect knowledge. All things are more clearly and certainly known to him, than any thing can be to us that we are ear and eye-witnesses unto. Therefore he is described with *seven eyes* (p). Now, *seven* is a number of perfection; and so the phrase imports God's perfect knowledge of all occurrences in the world. So the wheels also, in Ezekiel's vision, are described to be *full of eyes round about* (q), to signify God's all-seeing providence in all the parts of his government.

We see then that a perfect knowledge is variously attributed to God in scripture. And he must needs have such a knowledge, 1. Because he hath created all things. For, in creation, he is not a natural, but a voluntary agent, so that he cannot be ignorant of these things he hath made. Having given a being to all the creatures, he is able to discern them severally one by one, and to understand all their actions. Therefore, from his being Creator, the prophet infers the unsearchableness of his understanding. *The Creator of the ends of the earth—There is no searching of his understanding* (r). 2. Because of his universal providence. All things depend on him, in their being and operations. *In him we live, we move, and have our being* (s). All are supported and governed by his providential influence. *He upholdeth all things by the word of his power* (t): *And his kingdom ruleth over all* (u). Therefore he cannot but know all things particularly. Even the smallest things fall under his conduct; therefore all we do falls under his knowledge. The psalmist improves this argument, when he says, *Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right-hand shall hold me* (x). He that leadeth us by
the

(n) 1 John i. 5. (o) 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Psal. xi. 4. Numb. xi. 18. (p) Zech. iii. 9. (q) Ezek. i. 18. (r) Isa. xl. 28. (s) Acts xvii. 28. (t) Heb. i. 3. (u) Psal. ciii. 19. (x) Psal. cxxxix. 10.

the hand wherever we go, must be acquainted with all our ways (y). 3. God is a Being infinitely perfect: But knowledge is a perfection, a high excellency; therefore it must be in him after an infinite manner. No degree of ignorance can be imagined in the most perfect Being. 4. God hath endued creatures with knowledge. The knowledge of men and angels is derived from him. He is the Father of lights (z). All are but drops from this ocean. Now, if the creatures derive knowledge from him, it must be eminently and infinitely in himself; for nothing can give what it hath not. This argument is urged by the psalmist: *He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know* (a)? 5. God is every where present; included in no place, and excluded out of no place; so that he must see and know all things. *Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord* (b)? He is not far from every one of us (c): So that all we think, speak and do, is better known to him than to ourselves. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good (d). See now the psalmist urgeth this argument also, Psal. cxxxix. 7, &c. 6. This truth is clear from the accusations and condemnations of conscience. Conscience sometimes raiseth fears and terrors for the most secret sins, which none in the world are privy to but a man's self. Whence can this arise but from the sense of a Supreme Being that knows and understands all that we do? For, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things (e). 7. Nature itself hath a knowledge of this truth, that the Lord is a God of knowledge. The very heathens acknowledged it. Knowledge, says a Pagan orator, is the life of the gods †. Some called him Mind ‡, pure understanding: Others, the Inspector of all things §. The Greeks express him by a word which signifies to see ¶: And one of their seven wise men said, Men should have this opinion of God, that he seeth all things ¶. Some called him the eye of the world; and the Egyptians represented

(y) Psal. cxxxix. 3. (z) James i. 17. (a) Psal. xciv. 10.
 (b) Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. (c) Acts xvii. 27. (d) Prov. xv 3.
 (e) 1 John iii. 20.

† *Scientia deorum vita* Cicero.

‡ *νῆς*.

§ *ἐκαστῶς*.

¶ *Θεὸς αὖθις παρῶν, ut Basilii; vel, αὖθις παρῶν, ut Bradwardina.*

¶ *Homines existimare oportet, Deos omnia cernere. Thales, citant. Cic. de Legib. L. 2.*

presented him by an eye upon the top of a sceptre; implying that he is all eye. All the worship which the Heathens performed, their sacrifices, their solemn covenants, wherein they invoked the name of God, implied a sense of this truth, that *God is a God of knowledge.*

Second, I proceed to shew what God's knowledge is, and in what sense knowledge is attributed to him. It is that attribute whereby he understands all things, in and of himself, or by his own essence. It hath various names, according to the various objects of it. In respect of things past, it is called *Remembrance*. In respect of things present, it is called *knowledge* or *sight*. In respect of things to come, it is called *fore-knowledge*. And in regard of the universality of the objects, it is called *omniscience* (f).

In man, understanding is the faculty, and knowledge is either the habit, or the act proceeding from the faculty by the habit. But these are all one in God, and only distinguished according to our manner of conceiving. Whatever is attributed to God, is himself, his very essence. God's knowledge is God knowing. Therefore knowledge, as it is in us, a habit or act perfecting the understanding, or a disposition different from the understanding and added to it; so far it is not to be ascribed unto God. In attributing knowledge to God, we must remove all imperfections from knowledge in us, and ascribe unto him the most eminent way of knowing. We must not measure God's knowledge by our own, or think that he hath *eyes of flesh*, and *sees* and *knows as men* do (g). He hath an incomprehensible knowledge, in comparison of which ours is as mere darkness.

God's knowledge, though it be one and simple in him, yet in regard of the objects, it is variously distinguished. There is a knowledge of approbation, and a knowledge of apprehension.

1. There is his knowledge of approbation; which is a knowledge of favour and special regard. So it is taken in these texts. *The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.* And *you only have I known of all the families of the earth* (h). Hence God is said not to know them whom he doth not approve. *I will profess unto them*, says our Lord, *I never knew you* (†). In this sense God is said to know his own people two ways.

1. In his eternal purpose of love to them. *For whom he did foreknow*,

(f) Psal. xxv. 6, 7. Rom. xi. 33. Heb. iv. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2.

(g) Job x. 4. (h) Psal. i. 6. Amos iii. 2. (†) Matth. vii. 23.

foreknow, he also did predestinate, &c (i). Thus, he knows them long before they know him. 2. In the actual dispensation of his love and grace towards them in time. *He knoweth them that trust in him (k).*

2. There is God's knowledge of apprehension. As the former properly belongs to the will, though it be termed knowledge, because affection implies knowledge; so this properly belongs to the understanding. It is twofold. 1. His knowledge of simple intelligence or understanding, which is of all things possible, considered merely as such, and without respect to his decree. It respects all such things as are possible to be, if God please to will and order their being: And he sees and knows them in his own power and sufficiency to produce them. So that God hath the ideas of all possible things in his mind from everlasting. 2. His knowledge of sight or vision, which is of all things future or not future, considered simply as such. This, in our manner of conceiving *, supposeth and is consequent to his decree that such and such things shall be or not be in time. So that this kind of knowledge respects, (1.) All future things, though many of them are not yet sprung up into being: All things that have been, are, or shall be in time. (2.) Such possible things as are not future, and shall never come to pass: As that David shall not build an house to his name (l). (3.) What events would follow upon such and such possible occasions, which yet never shall be: As that the inhabitants of Keilah would deliver up David to Saul, if he abode in that place (m). He sees and knows all future things in his decree to produce them: And what possible things are not future, in his decree to continue them in a state of pure possibility: And what events would follow upon such and such occasions, in his decree connecting such events and occasions together.

We see then how these two kind of knowledge differ. That of intelligence is, in our manner of conceiving, antecedent to the decree; that of vision, supposeth it. That of intelligence respects merely the possibility of things; that of vision respects the futurity or not futurity of things in time. He knows things possible only in his power: But he knows what things are future, and what are not future, in his own will and decree determining the being or not being of

(i) Rom. viii. 29.

(k) Nah. i. 7.

* *In signo rationis*, say the schoolmen.

(l) 2 Chron. vi. 9.

(m) 1 Sam. xxiii. 21.

of them in time; seeing the futuration of things is founded only in the divine decree.

Third, I come next to speak of the objects of God's knowledge, or what he knows. And,

1. He hath an exact perfect and comprehensive knowledge of himself. This is especially to be attended unto, as the fountain of all his other knowledge. God doth perfectly know his own essence and infinite perfections. *The Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God (n)*. The word *search*, denotes an exact knowledge, such as men have upon diligent search and inquiry. The depths of the divine essence and perfections, are known only to God himself. He is blessed for ever in the enjoyment of himself, and therefore must needs know himself. And herein especially consists the infiniteness of his knowledge; for all other objects are but finite, but he himself is an infinite object for his own knowledge. In this he transcends all creatures.

2. He knows all other things. *Lord*, says Peter, *thou knowest all things (o)*. And says the apostle, *God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things (p)*. He could not be said to be omniscient, if he were ignorant of any one thing possible to be known. And indeed, what can be too difficult for him to know, when his own infinite essence is not so. Particularly, he knows, 1. All things possible. 2. All things past. 3. All things present. 4. All things to come.

(1.) He knows all things possible; all things that are possible to be wrought by his power, though he never give them a being: And these are innumerable. He *called those things which he not, as though they were (q)*: And consequently he knew them before they were; and if he know things that are not, he also knows what may never be. He knew what the men of Keilah would have done, if David had tarried in it (r). He knows things possible, though they shall never be; not in themselves, because they are not; nor in their causes, because they shall never be; but in his own power, or in himself as able to produce them.

(2.) God knows all things past. He knows them as if they were now present: For in regard of his eternity there is nothing past or to come with him. Hence his knowledge is called *a book of remembrance (s)*; signifying the continual presence of all things past before him. This is one of the books

(n) 1 Cor. ii. 10. (o) John xxi. 17. (p) 1 John iii. 20.
(q) Rom. iv. 17. (r) 1 Sam. xxiii. 11. (s) Mal. iii. 16.

books that shall be opened in the great day (t). All that passes stands on record there: *Behold*, says the Lord, *it is written before me* (u). God hath a perfect knowledge of all the occurrences that have been in the world, of all the creatures that have been, and of all their acts and operations, in thought, word, and deed. O how vast is his knowledge! It must needs be an infinite knowledge that can view all these at once. And without this knowledge of things past, God could not act the part of a Judge, in distributing rewards and punishments. It is true, forgetfulness is sometimes ascribed to God in scripture: But improperly, after the manner of men, viz. When God carrieth himself as men use to do when they forget; as, when he defers to make good his promises to his people, or to execute his threatenings against the wicked. So, he is said to *remember* a person or people, when he manifests his favour to them; and he is said to *forget* them, when he withdraws or withholds the testimonies of his favour and kindness from them. But a simple forgetfulness or defect of memory cannot be ascribed to God.

(3.) God knows all things present. He knows all the acts of his own power, and all the effects of his grace and goodness, and of his mercy and justice: So that this knowledge is grounded on his knowledge of himself.

First, He knows all the creatures from the least to the greatest. *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight* (x). *He knows all the fowls of the mountains* (y). *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names* (z). *Yea, the very hairs of our head are all numbered* (a). All the creatures are the effects of his own power: And the deformity or vileness of any of them cannot deform or defile him.

Second, He knows all the acts and operations of the creatures, whether in thought, word, or deed. 1. He knows all our thoughts. No thought can be withholden from him. He knows our most inward contrivances, our secret intentions and designs *. *He discerns the thoughts and intents of*

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(t) Rev. xx. 12. (u) Isa. lxv. 6. (x) Heb. iv. 13. (y) Psal. I. 11. (z) Psal. cxlvii. 4. (a) Matth. x. 30.

* *Sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, Deus intuitori.* Cic.

Socrates was wont to say, πᾶντα θεὸς ἐπιστάτω τὰ τε λεγόμενα καὶ τὰ ποιεῖσθαι καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ὃς οὐκ ἐπιστάται. Xenoph.

the heart. 2. He knows all our words. Hence the psalmist says, *There is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.* Yea, these words that are spoken in secret are not hid from him. Hence Elisha, the prophet, could tell the king of Israel the words that the king of Syria spoke in his bedchamber (b). 3. He knows all our actions: Our natural actions; *Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising* (c), says the psalmist: And our moral actions; all the ways of men. *Doth not he see my ways,* says Job, *and count all my steps* (d)? He tells our wanderings (e). *All our ways are before him* (f). *The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings* (g). Yea, he knows these actions that are most hidden and secret: For *he seeth in secret* (h); and *darkness biddeth not from him* (i).

And as he sees and knows all the gracious actings of men, the actings of their graces, their holy thoughts and meditations, their duties of piety and righteousness; so he sees and knows all the sins of men, in thought, word, and deed. *He seeth wickedness* (k): And *he beholdeth mischief and spite to requite it with his hand* (l). Yea, he seeth these sins that are committed in secret: *He sets our secret sins in the light of his countenance* (m); And he seeth what wicked men *do in the dark* (n). He knows his own law, and his own holiness, and therefore cannot but know what is contrary to both.

Third, More particularly, he hath an exact knowledge of the hearts of men. Hence he is said to *search and try the heart and reins*. He knows the general bent and inclination of the heart. He knows what graces are in the heart; and all the actings and exercise of grace. And he knows what corruptions are in the heart, and all the motions and workings of them (o). Solomon tells us, *Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more then the hearts of the children of men* (p)? He made the heart, and therefore cannot but understand the motions of it. *From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike: He considereth all their works* (q). And he giveth laws

(b) 2 Kings vi. 12. (c) Psal. cxxxix 2. (d) Job. xxxi. 4.
 (e) Psal. lvi. 8. (f) Psal. cxix 168. (g) Prov. v. 21.
 (h) Matth. vi. 4. (i) Psal. cxxxix. 12. (k) Job. xi. 11.
 (l) Psal. x. 40. (m) Psal. xc. 8. (n) Ezek. viii. 12.
 (o) Psal. vii. 9. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. Deut. xxxi. 21. Rev. ii. 19.
 Matth. ix. 2. Gen. vi. 5. (p) Prov. xv. 11. (q) Psal. xxxiii.
 14, 15.

laws to the heart, which necessarily implieth the knowledge of it. And without this he could not be a righteous judge. So much is implied in what the prophet says, *O Lord of Hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart* (r). Even the heathens had a sense of this †, that God is in the midst of our souls, searches and tries the heart, and exactly knows all the thoughts and counsels of men. Yea, it is the prerogative of God alone to know the heart immediately. *He, even he only knoweth the hearts of all the children of men* (s). And God challenges this as proper to himself. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, and try the reins* (t). *Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart* (u). The devils themselves can but guess at the thoughts of the heart, from the knowledge they have of our tempers, passions, interests, and the course of our actions.

(4). God knows all things future, or to come. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (x). *He understands our thoughts afar off* (y). That is, long before we think them. He knows what shall come to pass in all ages and generations; for *he declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done* (z). It is certainly a greater perfection to know future things than not to know them, and therefore cannot be denied of an infinitely perfect Being. And if he did not know future things till they come to pass, his knowledge would be mutable, and admit of an increase and growth; and his providence and government of affairs would be hereby overturned; for there can be no providence where there is no foresight. Again, God's knowledge of things to come is evident from the whole prophetic part of scripture: And the foretelling things to come, is what God challengeth as proper and peculiar to himself, and whereby he is distinguished from all false gods: *Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods* (a). All the prophets

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(r) Jer. xi. 20.

† *Nihil Deo clausum; interest animis nostris; & medijs cogitationibus intervenit.* Sen.

—— *Videt ille ortus obitusque: Quid Arctos, quid Boreas Hibernus agat: Ferrique togæque consilia, atque ipsam mortem probat.* Stat. 5. Sil. 1.

(s) 1 Kings viii. 39. (t) Jer. xvii. 9, 10. (u) 1 Sam. xvi. 7. (x) Acts xv. 18. (y) Psal. cxxxix. 2. (z) Isa. xli. 10. (a) Isa. xli. 23.

* *Præscientia Dei, tot habet testes, quot fecit prophetas.* Tertul. L. 2. contr. Marcion.

are witnesses of God's foreknowledge. And I add, that God's knowledge of things to come, doth necessarily follow on his knowledge of himself. He knows his own will and decree, and consequently what is to come, seeing nothing comes to pass but what he decreed. *He appointed the things that are coming, and shall come (b).* And seeing God knows things to come in his own will and decree, hence it follows that he knows them from eternity, and doth not know them only in their causes; and that his knowledge of them is most certain. To ascribe to God only a conjectural knowledge, is most unworthy of him; for then he could foretel things only by guess, and consequently might be deceived and mistaken.

Particularly, he knows all future contingencies; that is, such things as shall come to pass accidentally or by chance; and all the free and voluntary actions of men: For what is accidental, in regard of us, is certain, in regard of God and his will and decree. The holy scriptures ascribe such a knowledge to God. *I knew, says the Lord, that thou wouldst deal very treacherously (c)* And many future contingents and voluntary actions of men, have been foretold in scripture, and have accordingly come to pass. If God did not know future contingencies and voluntary actions till they come to pass, he would be still acquiring greater degrees of knowledge, which is inconsistent with his immutability and infinite perfection. And without this knowledge he could not govern the world; for such things might happen, and such resolutions be taken by men, unknown to him, as might perplex all his affairs, and oblige him to alter his counsels and methods. Hence it is that even the heathens * ascribed such a knowledge unto God. The liberty of man's will is not hereby diminished; for God's foreknowledge doth put any force upon men, to compel them to do this or that; and he not only fore-knew the actions of men, but also the manner of them, that they would do them freely.

SERMON

(b) Isa. xlv. 7.

(c) Isa. xlviii. 8.

* *At illis notum, qui pueri, qualisq; futura sit uxor. Joven.*

Nota est enim illis (i. e. Dijs) operis sui series, omniumq; illis rerum per manus suas iturorum scientia in certo semper est: Nobis ex abdito subit; & quæ repentina putamus, illis provisâ ventunt & familiaria. Sen.

S E R M O N . XVI.

Fourth, **I** Go on to speak of the manner of God's knowledge, or to shew you how he knows.

And here I promise these three things, in general. 1. We must not measure God's knowledge by our own. As his essence, so also his knowledge is inconceivably above ours: It is infinitely more pure and perfect. The manner of his knowledge is infinitely more above man's knowledge, than the knowledge of a man is above that of a beast. Therefore, the manner of his knowledge must be considered and conceived by us, as to remove from it all these imperfections our knowledge is attended with. 2. Seeing God is the most noble and excellent Being, he must have the most noble and excellent manner of knowing; for it is better to know in the most excellent manner, than to have a mean and low kind of knowledge. His knowledge must be of a higher elevation than the knowledge of any creature can be: And the more perfect and noble the manner of knowing is, the more perfect and noble is the knowledge itself. 3. The manner of God's knowledge is unknown to us. We, poor shallow creatures, are not able to comprehend it. The Psalmist, swallowed up in the thoughts of it, cries out, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: It is high, I cannot attain unto it* (a). It is far above our capacity. As the extent of his knowledge, in regard of the objects known, so the manner of his knowledge, is above our comprehension. We can as little comprehend the manner of his knowing, as the manner of his being. Yea, even in heaven itself, the saints shall no more comprehend the manner of his knowledge, than the glory of his essence. We must therefore study modesty and sobriety in searching into this mystery.

Yet something we may safely adventure upon with respect to the manner of God's knowledge. 1. Negatively. 2. Positively.

1. Negatively. And, 1. God doth not know by any species or images of things abstracted, as we know objects by the abstracted images of them which are conveyed into our minds by the senses. God is not beholden to objects to assist him with images, as we are; nor is his knowledge dependent upon or borrowed from the creatures. 2. He doth not know by bodily senses, as seeing and hearing: For he

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(a) Psal. cxxxix. 6.

hath not a body or bodily parts; so that he doth not see one thing with the eyes, and another thing with the mind, as we do. *Hast thou eyes of flesh?* says Job, *or seeest thou as man seeth* (b)? 3. He doth not know by any faculty: For, seeing he is a most simple and uncompounded Being, his understanding and his essence are one and the same. God is not made up of various parts as we are, and therefore doth not understand by a part of himself. 4. He doth not know by reasoning and discourse; that is, by deducing and arguing one thing from another: For this would argue a mixture of knowledge and ignorance in him. God stands in no need of reasonings. 5. He doth not know by information: For *who hath been his counsellor* (c)? Or, *who being his counsellor, hath taught him* (d)? He hath no need of the counsels or instructions of others, nor any need of a book to inform him.

2. Positively. God knows by his own essence. As I said, his understanding is not distinct from his essence; therefore what he knows, he knows by his essence. The beauty, perfection, life and vigour of all creatures, yea, all things possible, are eminently contained in the divine essence; so that by understanding his essence, he eminently understands all things. He sees all things possible, in his power; and all things future, in his own will; and he sees the nature of things in the eternal ideas in his own mind. So that seeing himself, he seeth all things: His own essence is the book or mirror wherein he beholds them.

From what is said, we may gather these excellencies and properties of God's knowledge; whence it will appear that he knows in the most excellent manner, and in a manner incomprehensible by us.

(1.) God's knowledge is essential and necessary. He knows all things necessarily. It is essential to his nature to know them. He can as soon cease to be God, as cease to be omniscient. Seeing his understanding and essence are one and the same, his knowledge must be as necessary as his essence.

(2.) God is infinite in knowledge. *His understanding is infinite* (e). Orig. *There is no account of it.* We can no more draw it into account, than we can number the drops in the ocean. It hath no bounds or limits. We cannot say, God knows

(b) Job. x. 4.

(c) Rom. xi. 34.

(d) Isa. xl. 13.

(e) Psal. cxlviii. 5.

knows all things but this or that; this were to set a bar to his knowledge. His knowledge extends to all objects.

(3.) It is intuitive knowledge, as the schoolmen speak. God knows all things, not successively, one after another, as we do, but one intuitive act. *The Lord looketh from heaven: He beboldeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth (f).* As there is no succession in his essence, so there can be none in his knowledge. Nothing is past or future with him. He knows things that are successive by one simple act of intuition, by one glance from eternity to eternity. Our understandings are unable to take in many objects at once, much less all objects. But God sees all things distinctly and particularly at one view. *All things are naked and open to his eyes (g): Naked and open, at once, more than any one thing can be to us.* Hence,

(4.) He knows all things most easily. It costs us a great deal of pains, search, and study, to make ourselves masters of a little knowledge. We must *seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures (h).* And it is but a little knowledge we attain to after many years study and experience: Hence Job says, *with the ancient is wisdom, &c (i).* But God hath a perfect knowledge of all things without any difficulty: Therefore mark what is said of God in the very next verse, *With him is wisdom and strength; he hath counsel and understanding (k).* With him it is, and he hath it; it is essential to him. To know any one thing, and to know all things, are alike easy to him. All things are but a point to the immensity of his knowledge. He can behold them at once with more ease than we can turn our eye.

(5.) He knows all things perpetually, in regard of the act of knowledge. Seeing he knows by his essence, he always knows. Men may have much knowledge in habit, when they have it not in act; sometimes they do not so much as think of it: But God is perpetually in the act of knowledge. He never *slumbers nor sleeps (l)*; as in regard of his providence, so also in regard of his knowledge.

(6.) God's knowledge is independent. He doth not borrow it from the creatures, nor depend on them for means of knowledge, as we poor worms do. As his essence is independent from the creature, so is his knowledge. He hath his knowledge from himself, and doth not fetch it from bor-

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(f) Psal. xxxiii. 13, 14. (g) Heb. iv 13. (h) Prov. ii. 4.
(i) Job. xii. 12. (k) Verse 13. (l) Psal. cxxi. 14.

rowed helps, or any thing without him. He knew the creatures before he made them; for *in wisdom he made them all* (m): Therefore he could not derive his knowledge from them.

(7.) His knowledge is clear and distinct, full and perfect. *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all* (n). He is *perfect in knowledge* (o): He is absolutely so. Men know things imperfectly, and by halves: What they know, they know but in part. We see little or nothing of the essence of things: And *we see* the noblest things but *as in a glass, darkly* (p): And the multitude of objects confounds our understanding. But God discerns the forms and essences of all things; all their causes, qualities, natures, properties, are open to him; he knows them thoroughly and distinctly. He sees to the very bottom. *All are naked and open to his eyes* (q). He beholds every thing thoroughly, as if he beheld nothing but that. *His eye-lids try the children of men* (r): He hath a distinct, critical, and thorough knowledge of them.

(8.) His knowledge is certain and infallible. It is not an opinion and conjecture. He is not subject to deceit or mistake: It is not consistent with his infinite perfection, to imagine him so to be. His understanding is a clear and fixed light. His essence is the measure of his knowledge, and in that he cannot be mistaken. He is as incapable of error and deceit in his knowledge, as of imperfection in his essence.

(9.) His knowledge is immutable. Seeing he knows by his essence, his knowledge admits no more of increase or decrease than his essence doth. He knows no more now than he did from everlasting, and to all eternity he shall know no more than he doth now. If his knowledge were capable of increase, it were not perfect and infinite; and if it did decrease, it would cease to be so. What way soever you suppose a change, you must suppose a present or a past ignorance. *There is no variableness in his mind, nor any shadow of turning* (s) in his eye, as there is in ours, to behold various things. There is a change in the things known; but his knowledge of them and their several changes, is invariable and unalterable.

(10.) His knowledge is eternal. He knows from all eternity all that he can know. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (t). And to eternity he can never

(m) Psal. civ. 24. (n) 1 John i. 5. (o) Job xxxvii. 16.
 (p) 1 Cor. xiii. 12. (q) Heb. iv. 13. (r) Psal. xli. 4.
 (s) James i. 17. (t) Acts xv. 18.

never lose any of his knowledge. He knows by his essence; therefore, his essence being eternal, his knowledge must be so too. All things, past and future, are present with him in regard of his eternity. What was done a thousand years ago, is as much present with his knowledge, as what was done but yesterday: *For a thousand years in his sight are but as yesterday when it is past (u).*

(11.) It is original knowledge: The original of all knowledge. All that have any knowledge, derive it from God: He is *the Father of lights (x)*. The most knowing men shine with a borrowed lustre. All the candles in the world are lighted at this torch. He *enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world (y)*. Men and angels light their lamps at this glorious Sun.

Fifthly, I shall now apply this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction. In several particulars.

Instr. 1. It follows from this doctrine that there is a judgment to come: For there is much secret wickedness for which men escape censure and punishment in this world; but all is seen and known by an infinitely holy and just God; therefore there must be a day, wherein he will bring all to light, and judge men for the same. *For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (z)*. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart (a). In that day God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to the gospel (b). Then shall this attribute of divine omniscience be publicly demonstrated and glorified in the eyes of the world. Then the books shall be opened, and the dead shall be judged out of these things which are written in the books, according to their works (c); so that the judgment will be most exact. God will judge from what he hath seen and known, so that there can be no mistake.

Instr. 2. The consideration of God's perfect knowledge may facilitate our belief of the resurrection of the same body. For when our bodies are dissolved and mouldered into dust, not the least atom of that dust can escape God's knowledge. *Hell and destruction are before the Lord (d)*. That is, the whole state of the dead, all their graves, all the bodies of men, and the dust of their bodies, all are open before him. He keeps

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(u) Psal. xc. 4. (x) James i. 17. (y) John i. 9. (z) Eccl. xii. 14. (a) 1 Cor. iv. 5. (b) Rom. ii. 16. (c) Rev. xx. 12, (d) Prov. xv. 11.

an exact account of them all, and knows what is become of all the atoms of dust that belong to such and such a body, and how to restore to every body what is essential to it, and can, by his power, call forth every atom of dust out of the treasures of his knowledge.

Instr. 3. It follows, from this doctrine, that secrecy is no shelter for sin. It is a proverb among sinners, *If thou canst not live chaste, yet carry the matter warily* †. But how vain and foolish is it for men to imagine that they can hide their sins from an all-seeing eye? Though men see not, yet God sees and knows. Hence the Lord tells the prophet, *They have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours wives—even I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord (e)*. Darkness is no covering from an all-seeing God: *Darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to him (f)*. Sinners are apt to think that all is safe, when secret and hid from the eyes of men; but this is to put a cheat on their own souls; for God sees all their secret wickedness. As the Lord tells that wicked people: *Thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, and lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations (g)*.

Instr. 4. See, from this doctrine, how admirable God's patience is towards the world: For he sees all the wickedness that is committed in all the secret corners of the world, and yet doth not destroy it. If all the villanies that are committed in such a city as this, in one day's space, were known to you, you would admire that God doth not make it like Sodom for judgment: But what are all the villanies committed in this city, in comparison of these innumerable swarms of sin that are committed all the world over, and that for so many revolutions of years and ages from Adam till now? Now, all these sins are *set in the light of God's countenance (h)*; he hath a distinct view of them all, not only in their number, but in their horrid nature; and his hatred of them is infinite: Yet he spares the world, and doth not destroy it. O what an amazing patience is this! The power of God is no less discovered in his forbearing to destroy the world for the wickedness he sees in it, than it was in making the world at first. Hence it is said, *The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power (i)*. His slowness to anger argues a mighty power over himself.

Use

† *Si non caste, tamen caute.*

(e) Jer. xxix. 23. (f) Psal. cxxxix. 12. (g) Jer. xiii. 25, 27.
(h) Psal. xc. 8. (i) Nah. i. 3.

Use 2. For reproof. To two sorts of persons.

Repr. 1. To them that invade God's right and prerogative as a God of knowledge. Men do this two ways. 1. By a curiosity to know what God hath kept secret. When men indulge themselves in vain speculations, and *intrude into these things they have not seen*, by searching boldly into things not revealed, and enquiring curiously into things above their reach; what is this but to pry into the secrets of God, and invade his prerogative? For *secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us (k)*. 2. By rash and uncharitable judging and censuring others. It is true, open crimes fall under the censure and judgment of men, in a way proper to them †. But when you take upon you to judge mens' future and final state; or to censure them for things indifferent, or for such actions as are capable of a good construction, or for doubtful actions, the good or evil whereof depends only on God's determination; or judge their principles and intentions, contrary to their solemn profession, though it be in some actions that cannot be excused: In all such cases, you invade the right of God, as if you had a knowledge equal to his; you *become usurping judges of evil thoughts (l)*.

Repr. 2. To such as deny God's infinite and perfect knowledge. Some deny it doctrinally, and others practically.

1. Some deny it doctrinally. Some ancient philosophers ascribed to God only a knowledge of generals, not of particulars, as if he knew things only in a heap, and confusedly, and not particularly. What is this but to deny the perfection of the divine knowledge, seeing it is a greater perfection to know things particularly, than to know generals only. Again, the Socinians, that they may the more easily establish an independent indifferency of man's free-will, ascribe to God only a conjectural knowledge in future contingencies, and a knowledge depending on the creature in free and voluntary actions; and they maintain, that God knows and understands by discourse, and reasoning from things more known, to things less known, as we do: All which are most dishonourable to God, and are bold attempts to rob him of this glorious perfection of his nature.

2. Others deny God's infinite and perfect knowledge practically. And men do so divers ways; as,

(1.) By

(k) Deut. xxix. 29.

† *Maledicere omnibus bonæ conscientie signum arbitrantur.*

(l) James ii. 4.

Hieron. contra Helvid.

(1.) By taking liberty to live and go on in sin. Wicked sinners fancy to themselves that God seeth them not; or they would gladly believe it, and bring their souls under this persuasion. Though flashes of fear come in upon them sometimes; yet they boldly presume that God shall not see them. The psalmist mentions this as the ground of the wicked carriage of the church's enemies: *They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it (m).* They secretly fancy that God, either doth not, or cannot take notice of them. To the same purpose is that text: *He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: He hideth his face, he will never see it (n).* And again, *They say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High (o)?* Eliphaz chargeth Job with this: *And thou sayest, How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him that he seeth not (p).* Alas, many live and walk so, as if the God whom they profess, were a blind and ignorant God, or as if they could blind his eyes. Sinners do many times flatter themselves out of God's sight, and please themselves with this imagination, that he sees them not. This is an inlet to all wickedness.

(2.) By an indulgence to secret sins. A practical disbelief of God's omniscience is at the bosom of this; as appears from that threatening, *Wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord; and their works are in the dark; and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us (q)?* How often do men take liberty to commit that in the dark, which they refrain from in the light, as if darkness were as great an obstruction to his knowledge as it is to ours. When you are drawn to sin upon the encouragement of secrecy, you do in so far deny God. Hence Job says, *If my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand:—I should have denied the God that is above (r).* Alas, the eye of man strikes a greater awe upon your heart many times than the eye of God. There is a secret atheism at the root of this: It is a practical denial of God's omniscience.

(3.) By seeking to hide and cover their sins from God. Men are naturally inclined to make vails for their sins. Adam, when he had sinned, sought to hide and excuse his sin: And

(m) Psal xciv. 5, 6, 7. (n) Psal. x. 11. (o) Psal. lxxiii. 11.
(p) Job xxii. 13, 14. (q) Isa. xxix. 15. (r) Job xxxi. 27, 28.

And we all tread more or less in his footsteps. Even the psalmist himself *kept silence* (s). That is, he did not freely confess his sins to God, but sought to palliate, excuse and extenuate them: Such a practice as this, is to charge God with a defect of knowledge, as if he could not see into the depths of a deceitful heart. Therefore Job clears himself of it, *If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom* (t).

(4.) By formality and hypocrisy in worship. When you seek to put off God with a glistering profession, and with fair outward shews and appearances of devotion; when your hearts are not right with God in duty, but you flatter him with your lips, and lie unto him with your tongues: This is to put a cheat upon God, and to think to blind his all-seeing eye, as if he could be imposed upon by such fair pretences, and did as little know you as ye do one another.

(5.) By omissions of secret duties. Sometimes secret duties are wholly neglected, which is a practical denial of God's omniscience, as if he did not see in secret. Sometimes they are very slightly and carelessly performed. If men had a window to see into your heart, in time of prayer, this would trouble you exceedingly: But, alas, it is no trouble to you that God seeth; which is an evidence that you have not the sense of his omniscience upon your hearts; you practically deny it. Sometimes men are at pains to enlarge themselves in prayer with others, but are slight and negligent in secret prayer: This is to say, upon the matter, that our heavenly Father seeth not in secret.

Use 3 For terror. To several sorts of persons.

1. Here is matter of terror to all wicked sinners. I am afraid that some among you, that hear me, proclaim a lawless liberty to yourselves; you live and go on in sin, dishonouring God, and breaking his laws: O, what a mad course do you run! But here is that which may be matter of terror to you, God sees and knows all: Nothing can escape his knowledge. As he knows your persons, so he sees your wickedness. *He knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also: will he not then consider it* (u)? Not a vain thought, nor an idle word, nor a wicked action, nor a slight and negligent service, but all is known to him. And it were better for you that your sins were known to all angels and men, than that they should be known to an omniscient God, who is infinitely just to take vengeance for them. For he, who is now
your

(s) Psal. xxxii. 3. (t) Job xxxi. 33. (u) Job xi. 11.

your witness, will one day be your judge: and if repentance, and fleeing to Christ, prevent it not, he will, on that day, set your sins in order before you; and, in hell, he will rip open all your sins to your face, which Basil thinks will be more terrible to the damned than all their other torments will be.

2. Here is matter of terror to secret sinners. Some of you, who are blameless in your walk before the world, do yet take a great deal of liberty to sin in secret, and in the dark; and you flatter yourselves with this, that no eye sees you, and would not for all the world that what you did were seen and known of men: As Job says of secret sinners, *The morning is to them even as the shadow of death* (x): If one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death. If men did discover you in your abominable ways in secret, you would be ready to die with the terror of it. But, ah, God sees and knows. Neither the darkest night, nor the closest curtains, can hide any sin from his eye: For *his eyes are as a flame of fire*; light and darkness are both alike to him; And he *sets our secret sins in the light of his countenance* (y): So that it is great folly to think to conceal a sin in secret. And on that great day, how will your faces gather blackness, and be filled with shame, when an omniscient God shall unvail all your wickedness before all the world!

3. Here is matter of terror to hypocrites. Many of you are rotten-hearted hypocrites, and please yourselves with fair shews and appearances of devotion. Though you are naught before God, yet you carry fair before men, and cover yourselves with a vail of piety: Like apples that are fair to look to, but are rotten at the heart. But though you may deceive men, yet you cannot deceive God: *He is not mocked*. The closest hypocrisy lies unmasked before him: For *he seeth not as man seeth*, &c (z). He judgeth not according to outward appearance. The omniscient God fathoms the secret depths of your heart; so that all your juggling and dissembling with him in duty, all your disguised pretexts, are clear to his eye.

S E R M O N XVII.

Use 4. **F**OR Exhortation: In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Let us reverence, honour, and adore the great God, on account of this glorious and admirable perfection. We use to pay a great veneration to men of

(x) Job xxiv. 17. (y) Rev. i. 14. Psal. xc. 8. (z) Gal. vi. 9. 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

of great knowledge; and shall we not much more honour and reverence the great God, for his infinite and incomprehensible knowledge? Is it not a great perfection to know and fore-know, not only the works, but also all the thoughts, purposes, and designs of any one man? But how much greater must it be, to know and fore-know all the secret practices, designs, thoughts and contrivances, of all the men that have been, are, or shall be, in all parts of the world? God's fore-knowledge is most admirable. Prophets have been in all ages and nations held in great veneration: How much more should God's infinite fore-knowledge of all things render him venerable and honourable in our eyes? Let us then admire this perfection in God, and adore him for it.

Exhort. 2. Get a deep sense of God's knowledge upon your heart, that you may live and walk always as in his sight. To this the Lord exhorts Abraham, *Walk before me, and be thou perfect (a)*. And the saints have done so. David *set the Lord always before him (b)*. And it was the psalmist's resolution to *walk before the Lord in the land of the living (c)*. Even the heathen could say that *we ought to live so as in his sight **. There ought to be frequent thoughts of God's knowledge, that the sense of it may be deeply impressed upon our hearts.

To excite and engage you to this, consider, 1. You are always under God's eye, whether you have a sense of it or not. *He is above all, and through all, and in you all (d)*: So that nothing can be hid from his sight. Your most secret actions, thoughts, and designs, lie open to him: For *all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (e)*. 2. Mens' being destitute of a due sense of God's knowledge is the root and spring of all wickedness. Hence the psalmist complains, *O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before them (f)*. As the sense of God's knowledge wears off, a door is opened to all iniquity: And if the sense of it were rooted out of the minds of men, they would attempt to act the greatest villanies with a daring boldness, and the foundations of human society would be quite overturned. 3. A deep sense of this divine perfection upon the heart

(a) Gen. xvii. i.

(b) Psal. xvi. 8.

(c) Psal. cxvi. 9.

* *Sic vivendum est tanquam in conspectu vivamus.*

Sen. Lib. de Mor.

(d) Eph. iv. 6.

(e) Heb. iv. 13.

(f) Psal. lxxxvi. 14.

heart will be of great use and advantage. For, (1.) It will beget humility and shame for our vileness before God. Would we not be ashamed and dejected exceedingly, if we could persuade ourselves that all our secret sins were known to all that converse with us? But how much more would we be ashamed and humbled, had we the due sense of this, that all our sins, with all the various circumstances and several aggravations of them, are exactly known to him who *cannot look on sin without an infinite detestation*? (2.) It will be a notable bridle of sin. The sense of it restrained Job from unclean thoughts and wanton glances: *I have made a covenant with mine eyes*, says he, *how then should I think upon a maid?* And then it follows, *Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps* (g)? Who would dare to speak treason against a prince, if he were sure he heard him? A sense of God's knowledge would make us watchful over our hearts and lives, and blush at the very first rise of sinful thoughts. Particularly, it would be a sovereign antidote against these deadly poisons of temptations, whereby many young people are corrupted and ruined. It would make us say with Joseph, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God* (h)? "Shall I affront God to his face? Shall I commit such wickedness, when he is looking on?" (3.) It will be a spur to duty. It engaged the psalmist to obedience. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies*, says he, *for all my ways are before thee* (i). It is a great encouragement, when we believe and consider that God sees and knows our diligence and faithfulness, the labour we undergo, and the discouragements we meet with in the way of our duty. This is the encouragement proposed by our blessed Lord to the angel of the church of Ephesus: *I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience*: And to the angel of the church of Smyrna, *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty* (k). Hence the Lord says to Abraham, *Walk before me, and be thou perfect* (l). The master's eye makes the servant work: So here, "Shall I be lazy and sluggish, remiss and negligent in duty, when God is looking on?" More particularly, a deep sense of God's knowledge will make you faithful and diligent in the duties of the several relations wherein you stand to others. When Jehoshaphat would quicken the judges to their proper work, he tells them, *God is with you in the judgment* (m). The apostle,

(g) Job xxxi. i, 4. (h) Gen. xxxix. 9. (i) Psal. cxix. 168. (k) Rev. ii. 3, 9. (l) Gen. xvii. 1. (m) 2 Chron. xix. 6.

postle; under the sense of this, discharged his trust sincerely and faithfully: *For we are not as many, says he, that corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ (n).* And again he says, *Even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts (o).* Hence also he minds earthly masters that they have a *Master in heaven (p)*, who sees and observes their carriage. And he suggests the consideration of God's eye to servants (q). So that men would be better in every relation, if this truth were deeply imprinted upon their hearts, that God sees and knows all they do, and that all their ways are before him.

For direction in this matter, 1. Believe God's omniscience, and believe it firmly. Labour to have the faith of it well rooted in your hearts. Many who profess to believe that God sees and knows all things, have only a dead opinion of it, which is easily taken up. Therefore labour to have a sound and lively faith of it. Such a faith is the gift of God; therefore go to him for it: and study the reasons and grounds on which his omniscience is built. Certainly, he that made us, and is ever present with us, and leads us by the hand wherever we go, must needs see and know all that we do. 2. Think often of this divine perfection, and think of it deeply and seriously. This is the way to have the sense of it deeply imprinted on the heart. God takes it kindly, when our minds are employed in thinking of him and his glorious perfections. He hath a *book of remembrance* for those that *think upon his name (r)*. 3. Look upon God, not only as your Witness, but also as your Judge. Remember that as he sees and knows all, so he *will bring every thing to judgment (s)*. It is to him you must give an account. The thoughts of this will render the sense of his omniscience the more operative and effectual. Solomon tells us, *A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment, scattereth away all evil with his eyes (t)*. Will a subject break the laws in sight of his sovereign? Will malefactors perpetrate villanies when their judge is looking on? So, shall we affront *the Judge of all the earth* to his face? Remember, that God sees wickedness, that he may avenge it: *He beholds mischief and spite to requite it with his hand (u)*.

But here it may be enquired, must we always have actual thoughts of this, That God is omniscient, and sees and knows

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(n) 2 Cor. ii. 17. (o) 1 Thess. ii. 4. (p) Eph. vi. 9.
 (q) Col. iii. 22, 23, 24. (r) Mal. iii. 16. (s) Eccl. 12, 14.
 (t) Prov. xx. 8. (u) Psal. x. 14.

all that we do? How can this be? I answer, 1. It is not possible that we can always have actual, distinct, and explicit thoughts of it. Therefore, in the lesser actions of our lives, a habitual sense of God's knowledge is sufficient. Yet, 2. We should often revive the thoughts of it in our souls. Alas, how sad is it, to have swarms of thoughts for vanity and sin, but few or none for God? He thinks of us every moment; and shall not we often think of him? Frequent thoughts of God's knowledge would cherish and keep alive the sense of it. 3. There are some cases and seasons wherein the thoughts of God's omniscience should be revived. As, (1.) In time of temptation. The thoughts of God's eye are a seasonable relief to the soul, when we are fore assaulted. So they were to Joseph when tempted by his lewd mistress (*). (2.) When God finds us out in our secret sins. When he sets conscience a-work, whether by his word, or by his Spirit, or by his providences; so that secret sins, and old forgotten sins, are brought to your remembrance, and set in order before your face: In such cases, you should think how God's all-seeing eye hath found you out. (3.) In the stated and solemn duties of God's worship.

In worship, we sit ourselves immediately before the Lord, and converse with him. Therefore it is called *coming to God*, and *drawing nigh to him* (y). In prayer, we come to speak to God; in the word, we come to hear God speak to us; in the Lord's supper, we come to be feasted at his table. Now, all this is but an empty formality, unless we have a sense of his omniscience and all-seeing eye. Therefore, before every duty of worship, let us open the curtains, and present God to ourselves as the searcher of hearts, and think that we go before him that sees and knows us. 1. This will quicken to preparation, that we may bring nothing before God but what is becoming his majesty. And we may judge of the suitableness of our preparation, by the depth of such impressions on us. 2. It will be a good mean to keep the heart right in worship. The neglect of it is the cause why men are so slight and formal, so customary and careless in their worship. But serious thoughts of God's all-seeing eye will be a means to prevent these evils, and give check to wandering and distracting thoughts. It would make us serious and intent, and inspire us with life and vigour, and engage us to behave ourselves with that reverence and awfulness that be-
comes

(*) Gen. xxxix. 9. (y) Heb. x. 1. James iv. 8.

comes the divine Majesty. Therefore, let us remember that we come before him, that searcheth the heart, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire; and let us set ourselves as in his sight. Particularly, let us do so, 1. In prayer. The psalmist begins his prayer with some thoughts of this: *Unto thee I lift up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens* (z). He thought of him as one sitting above, and beholding all that is here below. O, it is an awful thought, when we speak to God, that all our affections, desires, and aims, are naked and open to his eyes. In prayer, we beg that his *that eyes may be open to behold us* (a), as well as his ear attentive to hear us. All our faith and comfort, as well as seriousness, in prayer, depends on the belief and consideration of this, that God sees and knows all. 2. In hearing the word. Let us lift up our hearts, and set God before us, and say, *We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God* (b). We ought to be seriously attentive, as if God himself did speak to us by oracles. 3. In the Lord's supper. All the internal work is immediately transacted between God and our souls; therefore look on him as present that sees and knows all.

Exhort. 3. Improve the consideration of God's infinite knowledge, to profitable ends and purposes. As,

1. To humble you, and keep you humble, whatever measure of knowledge you have attained to. As pride is very natural to us; so there is nothing we are more apt to be proud of than our knowledge. The apostle tells us, *Knowledge puffeth up* (c). If men have but a little knowledge, beyond the vulgar, what a high conceit have they of themselves? How would they be esteemed by others? How insolent, if their opinion and judgment be not followed? But let us consider, 1. That all our knowledge is derived from God as the Fountain: So that it is a vanity to boast of it. Hence the apostle expostulates with self-conceited professors, *What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it* (d)? It is a light from the Father of lights; a stream from that eternal Fountain. 2. All our knowledge is but brutish ignorance, being compared with the divine knowledge. The psalmist owns this; *So foolish was I, and ignorant, says he, I was even as a beast before thee* (e). And so doth Agur,

Surely

(z) Psal. cxxiii. 1.

(a) Neh. i. 6. (b) Acts x. 33. (c) 1 Cor. viii. 2. (d) 1 Cor. iv. 7. (e) Psal. lxxiii. 22.

Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man: I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy (f). † How little do we know in comparison of what we are ignorant of? All our knowledge is confined to narrow bounds: It is but of the outside and face of things; a mere nothing, in comparison of the divine knowledge. O what a vain ignorant thing is man, being compared with God! On these accounts, the consideration of God's omniscience should render us vile and low in our own eyes.

2. To quicken you to repentance for sins past. Consider, 1. God remembers all your bypast sins. What a senseless thing is it to be careless of sins committed many years ago? Though these sins be forgotten by you, yet they are remembered by an infinite understanding. They are written in a book which lies always before God. *Behold, says the Lord, it is written before me (g).* He sometimes binds himself by oath not to forget the sins of men. *The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, surely I will never forget any of their works (h).* 2. God remembers your past sins in all their aggravating circumstances. He knows them exactly, having taken exact notice of them when they were committed. *His eye-lids try the children of men.* He not only knows, but *ponders all your goings, and considers all your works (i).* He is not a bare spectator, but a diligent observer. He remembers the place where, the time when, and the light, mercies and vows, against which you sinned; and the number of your sins are written in his book; they are marked before him. 3. He remembers your sins so as to avenge them, if you continue impenitent. He observes them in order to a just recompence. *He beholdeth mischief and spite to requite it with his hand (k).* He hath them recorded for future vengeance. So the Lord tells us, *Behold it is written before me, I will not keep silence, but will recompence, even recompence into their bosom (l).* They are laid up in store with him, and sealed up amongst his treasures: And a time of expence will come; for to him belongeth vengeance and recompence, so that their feet shall slide in due time (m). Well then, let the consideration of all this awaken and quicken

(f) Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

† *Maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus.*

(g) Isa. lxxv. 6. (h) Amos viii. 7. (i) Psal. xi. 4. Prov. v. 21. Psal. xxxiii. 15. (k) Psal. x. 14. (l) Isa. lxxv. 6. (m) Deut. xxxii. 34, 35.

quicken you to repentance, and to faith in the blood of Christ. Plead with the psalmist, *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions*: and *O remember not against us former iniquities* (n). If you continue in impenitence and unbelief, your account is but growing, and God will at last reckon for all together. As it is the comfort of the godly, so it is the misery of all unbelieving, impenitent sinners, that their record is on high (o).

3. To encourage you to duty. What an encouragement is it to diligence and faithfulness in the work and service of God, notwithstanding of many difficulties and seeming discouragements, that God sees and knows all, so that nothing shall be forgotten? Thus the apostle encourages the believing Hebrews, *God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love* (p). All the good you do is set on record. There is a book of remembrance written before him, for them that fear the Lord, and think upon his name (q). None of your good deeds shall be wiped out (r). O, what an encouragement is this, to labour earnestly, and to abound in the work of the Lord!

4. To keep you from shifting duty upon frivolous pretences. Sometimes when such duties are required of you, as have some special difficulty in them, or hazard attending them, your false heart is apt to frame many excuses and devices for shifting them. Sometimes you pretend want of ability or opportunity for them: Sometimes insuperable difficulties are pretended, that *there is a lion in the way*. But though men may be deluded by such excuses and pretences, yet *God is not mocked*. An omniscient and heart-searching God knows whether your hearts be sincere or false in such cases; and whether such excuses be real, or only pretended. To this purpose is that which Solomon says; *If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain: If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart, consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works* (s)? As his justice cannot be biased, so his knowledge cannot be imposed upon.

5. To engage you in the study of sincerity and uprightness. Hence David gives this direction to Solomon: *And thou Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him*

(n) Psal. xxv. 7. Psal. lxxix. 8. (o) Job xvi. 19. (p) Heb. vi. 10. (q) Mal. iii. 16. (r) Neh. xiii. 14. (s) Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.

him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind : For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts (t). Not only our actions, but also our principles and ends, and manner of performing duties, lie all naked and open to his eye : And these he chiefly regardeth. Therefore study to be what you seem to be. God looks into the heart, and searches the heart (u) : Therefore let it be your great care to have your heart right with God. Your business lies not with men, but with God, who knows all the deceits and tricks of a false heart. He weigheth the spirits (x).

6. To deter and restrain you from the practice of sin. God's eye is still upon you : And will you break God's laws before his face, and when he is looking on ? As king Ahasuerus said of Haman, *Will he force the queen also before me (y) ?* What an impudent wife must she be, that will prostitute herself to another, in the sight of her own husband ? This is the reason used to enforce obedience to the First Commandment, *Thou shalt have no other gods BEFORE ME*. We cannot sin but God is still looking on. Oh, shall we affront God to his face ? *All things are naked and open unto his eyes (z)*. Every sin is naked, anatomized, and ript up before him. Why should secrecy strengthen a temptation to sin, when we have to do with a God that sees in secret ? *For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves (a)*. Let us improve this thought to restrain and curb the corruption that is in our hearts. Solomon prescribes this to restrain young men from the sin of uncleanness ; *And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger : For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings (b)*. Yea, let us improve it to curb the very first motions of sin in our hearts. *Why should I think upon a maid ?* says Job, *Doth not he see my ways and count all my steps (c) ?* Upon the approach of every temptation, guard your hearts with that question wherewith the people of God fortified themselves against temptations to idolatry, *Shall not God search this out ? For he knoweth the secrets of the heart (d)*.

7. To encourage you to go God for assistance, and success,
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(t) 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. (u) 1 Sam. xvi. 7. (x) Prov. xvi. 2.
(y) Esth. vii. 8. (z) Heb. 4. 13.

(a) Job xxxiv. 21, 22. (b) Prov. v. 20, 21. (c) Job. xxxi. 1, 4. (d) Psal. xliv. 21.

in that great and necessary duty of self-examination. In searching and trying ourselves, we do oft-times fall into great mistakes, or our endeavours are fruitless and unsuccessful, because we set about the work in confidence of our ability and sufficiency for it, and do not depend on the assistance of God's all-seeing eye. Therefore, when you engage solemnly in this duty, go to the all-seeing God, that you may have a clearer eye to direct you than your own. He can discover that to you which otherwise will lie hid from your view. Particularly, beg his assistance, 1. In examining and trying your state. Sometimes you question your own sincerity, and are so full of darkness and confusion, that you cannot discern your own state, so as to make a right judgment about it. Therefore plead with God, that your dark and confused minds may be enlightened by a beam from his knowledge, that so you may not mistake counterfeit grace for true grace. He that knows your sincerity, can best discover it, and make it known to yourselves. 2. In examining and searching out your sins. There are often some hidden sins and corruptions, which your dimness cannot discover by the most accurate search; but God's all-seeing eye can make them visible to you. Therefore, pray with Job, *Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.* And, as Elihu directs, *That which I see not, teach thou me (e).* Hence, David, after a long meditation on the omniscience of God, desires the exercise of this attribute in discovering him to himself, that he might discern any corrupt and wicked inclination that might be in him; *Search me, O God, says he, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me (f).*

8. To encourage you to trust in God, and to depend on him in every strait. As he knows the state and condition, the wants, necessities, miseries and distresses of his people (g); so he cannot forget his covenant and promises. Therefore they may confidently rest on him for seasonable and suitable mercies according to his promise. Hence it is said, *He hath remembered his covenant for ever. And, he remembered his holy promise. And, he remembered for them his covenant (h).* His knowledge is his book of remembrance, to mind him what he hath to do. Neither his mercy to pity us, nor his goodness to relieve us, nor his power

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(e) Job x. ii. Job xxiv. 32. (f) Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.
(g) Matth. vi. 8, 32. (h) Psal. cv. 8, 42, and 6, 45.

to protect us, nor his wisdom to guide us, could be a sufficient ground of trust, if he were not omniscient, to know us, and our wants and necessities, and to remember what he stands engaged by promise to do for us. But we may safely depend upon his other perfections, seeing he hath an infinite knowledge to direct them in their exercise. Next, as he knows all our straits, miseries, and distresses; so he knows all the proper remedies. He knows when the laying on affliction, or the removing of it, may contribute most for his own glory and the good of his people. Again, he knows all future things. He knows what will be the effect of every cause, and the event of every counsel: So that he cannot be surprised with any thing that can happen to us, nor forced through ignorance to take new counsel. Upon these grounds let us be encouraged to commit ourselves wholly to him. This is the use that the psalmist makes of God's omniscience; *Thou hast seen it, says he, for thou beholdest mischief and spite to requite it with thy hand: The poor committeth himself unto thee (i);* and so do I.

S E R M O N XVIII.

Exhort. 4. **W**OULD you have any profitable and useful knowledge? Go for it to God as a God of infinite knowledge. His is original knowledge, the spring and fountain of all knowledge that is in the creatures. God challenges this to himself as his prerogative, *Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who hath given understanding to the heart (a)?* To this purpose it is said, *There is a Spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding (b).* All the light and knowledge of arts and sciences is from him. *He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding (c).* We must shine in his beam. Therefore seek to God, and depend on him for all needful knowledge. Study alone will not make you knowing men. Look up to the Father of lights.

More particularly, go to him for saving and practical knowledge; such a knowledge of God, and Christ, and of the mind and will of God, as deeply affects the heart, and influenceth the life and practice. Consider, 1. You are naturally blind and ignorant in spiritual things. *He that lacketh*

(i) Psal. x. 14.

(a) Job xxxviii. 36. (b) Job xxxii. 8. (c) Dan. x. 21

lacketh the graces of the Spirit is blind (d). Your *understanding* is naturally *darkened (e)*. Yea, how defective are even the most eminent saints in point of knowledge? Hence David is often so earnest for divine teaching (*f*). Our natural blindness is cured only in part; much of it still remaineth. We need to have our eyes more opened, and our sight more cleared. 2. Saving and practical knowledge is a very great blessing. It is a distinguishing blessing; a special gift of God only to a few whom he dearly loveth. It is a principal part of the image of God in man. It promotes the increase and exercise of all the graces of the Spirit. It is heaven begun: A perfection in it is the happiness of the glorified above (*g*). 3. God alone is the Author and Fountain of this knowledge. It is not attainable by natural reason: For *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (h)*. It cannot be attained by our own pains, industry, and study. It is of a divine original. We must be *taught of God, and learn of the Father*. It is an *union from the holy One*; and a fruit of *God's shining into the heart (i)*. 4. You may go to God for this knowledge with confidence and hope. He is no less willing to communicate saving knowledge to men now, than he was at man's first creation. This is the encouragement the apostle proposes, *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: And it shall be given him (k)*. God is not like a proud man, that had rather expose another to shame for his ignorance, than to be at pains to teach him. 5. Prayer is a special mean to obtain this blessing. Solomon tells us, *If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding—Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God (l)*. God is the *hearer of prayer (m)*. All other means are sanctified by prayer. When you use other means, without owning God, you make an idol of your own understanding.

Well then, seek to God for knowledge, and especially for saving knowledge. And, 1. Seek it humbly, lamenting and bewailing your ignorance. John wept because *the book was sealed*; and he got it open by *weeping (n)*. When you are a-

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shamed

(d) 2 Pet. i. 9. (e) Eph. iv. 18. (f) Psal. cxix. and elsewhere. (g) Col. iii. 10. 2 Pet. i. 2. John xvii. 3. (h) 1 Cor. ii. 14. (i) John vi. 45. 1 John ii. 20. 2 Cor. iv. 6. (k) James i. 5. (l) Prov. ii. 3, 5. (m) Psal. lxxv. 2. (n) Rev. v. 4, 5.

shamed of your ignorance, then may you look to be taught of God. Hence the Lord says to Ezekiel, *If they be ashamed, shew them the form of the house* (o). Again, humbly submit your reason to divine revelation. *God reveals himself to babes* (p). He reveals the choicest truths to meek and humble souls. *The meek will be guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way* (q). 2. Seek it earnestly. Be very importunate, and take no nay-say. *Cry after knowledge* (r). Follow God, as the blind men did Christ (†). Be earnest that the eyes of your understanding may be opened: And never give over, till God break in upon your heart with the lively light of his Spirit. 3. Seek it in Christ. You must yield up yourselves to God to be taught by the Spirit: And this resignation must be made in and through Christ the Mediator; for, without a mediator, God will not speak to you sinful creatures, unless out of the fire in words of wrath. If he speak to you in words of peace and salvation, it must be from the mercy-seat, that is, through Christ, who is God's Propitiatory (s). 4. Seek it in the due use of appointed means. Be diligent and attentive in reading and hearing the word, and attend the ordinance of catechizing. These being the means of God's appointment, you must, in the use of them, wait for the teachings of the Spirit. You must *hear*, if you would *learn of the Father* (t). The opening the scriptures, and the opening the understanding, go together (u).

Use 5. For comfort. To you who are the children of God, and have a special covenant interest in him and relation to him, the doctrine of God's omniscience affords you ground of strong consolation, in divers cases. As,

1. Under spiritual desertion, and groundless apprehensions of being neglected or forgotten by God. The children of God are sometimes haunted with this temptation, that God hath forgotten them, and doth not look after them, nor take notice of what concerns them; as if he did not mind that there is such a man in the world. Hence the church cries out, *My Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me* (x): And the psalmist, *Why hast thou forgotten me* (y)? And God reprehends this in his people, *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God* (z). But in this case,

(o) Ezek. xliii. 11. (p) Matth. xi. 25. (q) Psal. xxv. 9. (r) Prov. ii. 3. (†) Matth. xx. 31. (s) Rom. iii. 25. (t) John vi. 45. (u) Luke xxiv. 32, 45. (x) Isa. xlix. 14. (y) Psal. xlii. 9. (z) Isa. xl. 27.

case, it may comfort you who are the children of God, that you are not unknown to him. He knows the persons of all his own. *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. He knows his sheep by name.* Hence he says to Moses, *I know thee by name* (a). He knows you by name and surname. As he foreknew you from eternity; so he cannot be ignorant of you in time (+). And he cannot forget you. Hence he says to his church, *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she would not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. Your names are written in the Lamb's book of life.* Christ says of the sparrows, *not one of them is forgotten before God* (b). And are his own children forgotten? He knows and remembers you in this world, to care for and look after you, to pardon your iniquities, heal your diseases, strengthen you under temptations, guide you in your difficulties, preserve you in dangers, and to perform all things for you: And he will remember you at last, to raise you out of your graves, to gather you to himself, and to reward you according to his promise.

2. Here is ground of comfort against all unjust censures of your persons or ways. Sincere Christians are often judged and censured as hypocrites, and their best actions as acts of hypocrisy. Some indeed censure them ignorantly; others do it knowingly and wickedly. They are often mistaken and misunderstood by men, and the worst constructions put upon their best performances. But, in this case, it may be very comfortable to you whose hearts are upright before God, that you have a Judge of infinite knowledge, who knows exactly the state of your persons, the integrity of your hearts, and the uprightness of your ways: For, *he looks into the heart, and knows the way of the righteous* (c). How comfortable is it, that God is not led by the judgment of men, and cannot mistake the reality of a mere appearance? He sees and knows, not only your outward actions, but your inward affections, principles, and ends. The saints take comfort from this. *Also now, says Job, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high: And, He knows the way that I take* (d). With what comfort did the prophet appeal to God? *But, thou,*

(a) 2 Tim. ii. 19. John x. 3, 14. Exod. xxxiii. 12.
 (+) Rom. viii. 30. (b) Isa xlix. 15. Rev. xvii. 8. Luke xii. 6.
 (c) 1 Sam. xvi. 7. Psal. i. 6. (d) Job xvi. 19. and xxiii. 10.

thou, O Lord, knowest me, thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart towards thee (e). Yea, Christ himself is brought in taking comfort from this, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest (f). How comfortable is it when you can appeal to God for your sincerity, and say with Hezekiah, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart; and have done that which is good in thy sight (g): And with Peter, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee (h)? It may sometimes comfort us, that God knows we did that in the integrity of our hearts, which men censure as done for base and sordid ends,

3. Here is ground of comfort against Satan's accusations. He is called *the aceuser of the brethren*, and is said to *accuse them before God day and night* (i). He accuses them to God for their sins, as he did Joshua, the high priest (k). And he wrests and misrepresents their best actions, as if done in hypocrisy, and for base ends; as he did with Job. But it may be comfortable to you who are truly godly, in this case also, that God knows your sincerity, and the integrity of your ways; so that Satan shall never prevail to get you cast out of God's favour. God knows you well enough, and sees the falshood of Satan's accusations, and that he does no more but slander you. There is no possibility of his imposing upon an omniscient God. This may also comfort you, when, through the malice and subtilty of Satan; slanders and false accusations are raised against you among men. Your name is bright in God's sight, how much soever it be sullied before men.

4. Here is matter of comfort in secret duties. Sincere Christians are so much afraid of hypocrisy and vain-glory, when their duties lie too open to the eyes of men, that they affect great privacy in performing many duties. As many sinners seek corners wherein to act their wickedness; so do the saints seek corners wherein to pray and meditate, and perform other duties. Now, the world can take no notice of this: Yet nothing is lost. It is comfort enough to a sincere Christian, whose great aim is to please God, that he sees and knows all. And as he *sees in secret*, so he will *reward openly* (l). Yea, he sees into the most secret recesses of the heart; so that not a gracious desire, nor a holy thought, can

(e) Jer. xii. 3. (f) Psal. xl. 9. (g) 2 Kings xx. 3.
 (h) John xxi. 17. (i) Rev. xii. 10. (k) Zech. iii. 1, 3.
 (l) Matth. vi. 4, 6.

can escape his notice. He hath a *book of remembrance for them that think upon his name*. He sees, not only your *works and labours*, but also your *faith and patience* in working them, and your *sincere love* in them (*m*). And though there be many weaknesses and imperfections in your best duties: Yet God searches your heart, and sees what good is in it, and knows and approves of your good affections, in the midst of manifold weaknesses that are mingled with your performances.

5. More particularly, here is matter of comfort in secret prayer. God sees and knows your prayers (*n*), though never so secret. How comfortable is it, that you do not call upon a deaf and ignorant idol, but upon a God of infinite knowledge, who can discern your particular cry, though crouded by a multitude of cries from others; as Christ discerned the believing touch of a poor woman from the press of the thronging multitude? Again, when you are at a loss how to express yourselves in prayer; yet God knows and understands your sighs and groans; he knows what is the mind and meaning of the Spirit in them. So the apostle tells us, *The Spirit it self maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered: And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit* (*o*). How doth David cheer himself with this: *O Lord, says he, my groaning is not hid from thee*. And he hears your tears, the voice of your weeping; and reserves your tears in his bottle (*p*). Again, your present condition may be such, that you cannot pray in any good order and method, but your prayers are full of distraction and confusion: Yet God understands the meaning of them, and knows how to distinguish between what is yours and what is his in your prayers. He sees and knows the frame of your hearts in prayer, if they be meek, humble, and broken; and he judges of your prayers by that, and not by external enlargements. Again, when in prayer you forget any thing which at first you intended: Yet God knows the mind of the Spirit, and therefore will put that in your prayers for you, which you forgot to put in yourselves. He hears your desires, though they be not formally expressed in prayer. Hence the psalmist says, *Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: And, Lord, all my desire is before thee* (*q*). And he knows all your wants and necessities, though you have not expressed them: *Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him* (*r*). 6. Here

(*m*) Mal. iii. 16. Rev. ii. 2. Heb. vi. 10. (*n*) Matth. vi. 6.
 (*o*) Rom. viii. 26, 27. (*p*) Psal. xxxviii. 9. Psal. vi. 8. Isa. xxxviii.
 5. Psal. lvi. 8. (*q*) Psal. x. 17. Psal. xxxviii. 9. (*r*) Matth. vi. 8.

6. Here is matter of comfort in the want of ability and opportunity to do good. Sometimes you have an earnest desire and firm purpose of doing good things: But you have no ability to bring the same to pass, or you lack opportunity. In this case it is comfortable that God knows your heart and mind in it. The desires and purposes of your heart lie open to his view, and are acceptable and pleasing to him. Because he searches the heart, therefore he accepts the will for the deed: *For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not (s).* So God knew and accepted of David's purpose to build a house for his name: *Thou didst well, says the Lord, in that it was in thine heart (t).*

7. Here you have ground of comfort in all your infirmities and weaknesses. God knows and remembers them; and this moves and engages his tender compassion. So the psalmist tells us, *Like as a father pitieth his children; so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust (u).* This the psalmist gives as a reason why he is so gracious in pardoning, so backward in punishing, and so patient in waiting. He knows how frail your natural constitution is, how frail and brittle you are by creation, and how little you are able to endure, how easily cracked and crushed: And his mindfulness of this excites his compassion, so that he will debate with you in measure, and deal gently with you. Again, he knows your weakness and infirmity by corruption, how apt you are to be drawn to sin, against your sincere purpose: And therefore will either preserve you from temptation, or support you under it, and pass by your infirmities. And he knows how weak in grace you are, and how little strength you have for duty; and therefore pities you, and pardons your short-comings, and expects no more than you are able to do.

8. Here is ground of comfort also under your afflictions. The trials and distresses of the children of God are not unknown to him. *He knows their tribulation and poverty (x).* And he hears their cries under affliction. So the Lord tells Moses, *I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, by reason of their task-masters: For I know their sorrows (y).* He sees into their dungeons, and beholds their miseries, and knows their straits and extremities, and pities their afflicted case. This was a comfort to the psalmist, *Thou hast seen it, says he, for thou beholdest mischief and spite to re-*
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(s) 2 Cor. viii. 12. (t) 2 Chron. vi. 8. (u) Psal. ciii. 13, 14.
(x) Rev. ii. 9. (y) Exod. iii. 7.

quite it with thy hand : *The poor committeth himself unto thee* (z). Your compassionate Father sees and beholds the spite and malice that lurks in the hearts of wicked oppressors, and the mischief that is done by their hands. Particularly, this may cheer your heart in your outward wants and straits, *Your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things* (a). Your Father who loves you dearly, and hath all power in his hand, and can perform all things for you, he knows your necessities and pinching straits. This may relieve your minds against all distrustful fears and cares.

9. Here we have matter of comfort against the subtle plots and clandestine contrivances of enemies against the church. God hath an exact knowledge of them : For his eyes pierce into their very hearts. Solomon tells us, *Hell and destruction are before the Lord ; how much more then the hearts of the children of men* (b). All the church's enemies, even such of them as are most secret, lie open to him. Many of them are hid from us, their hatred against religion being disguised with fair pretences of friendship : But none of them can lie hid from an all-seeing God. *Mine adversaries are all before thee* (c), saith the psalmist, as a type of Christ. They are all before him, not only as to their persons, but also in their secret and subtle devices and counsels against his church and people. He sees their rage and malice. He knows when they go to consult, and what are their decrees and resolutions. To this purpose the Lord says to Sennacherib the king of Assyria, *I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me* (d). God cannot be deceived by the most close and subtle enemies. He knows all the methods of their counsels, and how they resolve to execute their designs. Though they seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, *Who seeth us ? or who knoweth us ? Yet surely their turning of things upside-down shall be esteemed as the potters clay* (e). The most subtle contrivances of enemies are never too deep for God to fathom, nor too close for him to frustrate.

DISCOURSE

(z) Psal. x. 14.

(a) Matth. vi. 32. (b) Prov. xv. 11. (c) Psal. lxxix. 19.
(d) Isa. xxxvii. 28. (e) Isa. xxix. 15, 16.

DISCOURSE V.

Of the Wisdom of God.

SERMON XIX.

Jude 25. *To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

IN this verse, and the preceding, the apostle concludes this epistle with a solemn doxology, or voice of praise unto God. We may notice these two things in the verse.

1. To whom this praise is here given; *to God*. And as he is set forth in the preceding verse by his power, so here by his wisdom and goodness. 1. By his wisdom; *the only wise God*. I take the name *God* here essentially, as including all the persons of the God-head. God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is *the only wise God* to whom praise is here given. Some interpreters understand the name *God* here personally, and think that the Son, the second person, is here meant: But grant it be so, yet wisdom is here attributed to him as he is God; and when he is called *the only wise God*, wisdom is not so appropriated to him as to exclude the wisdom of the Father and of the Holy Ghost, but to exclude the wisdom of all the creatures. Though some of the creatures have wisdom; yet in comparison of the wisdom of God, it is none at all, or doth not deserve that name. 2. By his goodness, implied in this title, *Saviour*. This title is most frequently given to the Son in scripture, because he only assumed our nature, and by his obedience and sufferings in that nature purchased spiritual and eternal salvation for us. Yet this title is also given to God essentially considered: So that not only is *God the Son* our Saviour, but *God the Father* also (a), as he is the Author and Fountain of our salvation, by designing and purposing salvation for an elect company, and contriving the way of salvation, and sending Christ to purchase it, and the Holy Ghost to apply it: And so *God the Holy Ghost* is also our *Saviour* (b), by applying the salvation Christ hath purchased to all the elect.

2. The

(a) Isa. xliii. 3. and xlv. 15. (b) 1 Tim. ii. 3.

2. The praise that is given to him. To him be glory and majesty, &c. But it is the first words of the verse that I am to insist upon; in the prosecution of this doctrine.

Observ. *Wisdom is the property and excellency of God alone; or, he only is wise.*

I shall here shew,

1. *What wisdom is, and in what sense it is attributed to God.*
2. *That God is wise; or that wisdom is one of the properties and excellencies of his nature.*
3. *That he is the only wise God; and in what sense he is so.*
4. *Wherein the wisdom of God doth appear.*
5. *I shall apply the doctrine.*

First, What wisdom is, and in what sense it is attributed to God. There is a two-fold wisdom of God spoken of in scripture. 1. His personal wisdom; and that is the Son, the second person, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is called by the apostle *the wisdom of God* (c). And he is frequently expressed by this name in the book of the Proverbs, especially in chapters viiith and ixth. He is called *the wisdom of God*, because in him God did shew forth his wisdom in an eminent manner; and *in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (d); and it is he that reveals to us the Father's secrets, and declares to us the counsel of God for our salvation. 2. His essential wisdom; which is his wisdom considered as an essential property of his nature, and common to the three persons in the God-head. It is of this I speak here.

In the preceding discourse I spoke of God's knowledge. There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. The apostle speaks of them as different gifts of the Spirit in men: *To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit* (†). Knowledge respects things considered absolutely, and in themselves; wisdom respects things in the relation they have to one another as means and ends. So that knowledge is the root of wisdom, and wisdom is the fruit of knowledge. Knowledge is the foundation of wisdom, and wisdom is the superstructure upon knowledge. Knowledge is only an act of the understanding; but wisdom is an act both of the understanding and of the will. Knowledge belongs to speculation; but wisdom belongs to practice,

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tice,

(c) 1. Cor. i. 24.

(d) Col. iii. 3.

(†) 1 Cor. xii. 8.

tice, and is the splendor and lustre of knowledge shining forth in our resolutions and actings. And as these two are different gifts and excellencies in men, so also they are distinct perfections in God, according to our manner of conceiving His knowledge is the simple understanding of things; but his wisdom is his skilful contriving and appointing, ordering and disposing of all things. The apostle speaks of them as distinct perfections: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (e)!*

Wisdom, in man, is that virtue or ability whereby he disposeth and orders his resolutions, undertakings and actings, so as he may best attain the worthy end which he proposeth to himself. So, the wisdom of God is that perfection whereby he disposes and orders all things in such a way as doth most advance and promote his own glory. There are several things wherein wisdom in man doth consist; and there is in the divine wisdom what is answerable to them in our conception. 1. Wisdom lies in proposing a right end to ourselves. He is the wisest man that acts for the noblest end: So God is infinitely wise, as he acts for the most excellent end, to wit, his own glory: *For of him, and through, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen (f).* 2. Wisdom lies in making choice of and using the most fit and proper means for attaining our end. Now, God is at liberty to use what means he pleaseth: and as he sometimes works by small means, by unlikely means, by seemingly contrary means; so it is his prerogative, that he gives a right bias to any means he is pleased to use for promoting his own glory. And sometimes the means he useth are very admirable, and in their own nature mysterious, wherein his wisdom doth radiantly shine forth; as in our redemption by Christ. 3. Wisdom lies in laying hold upon and improving the fittest seasons for bringing about our designs. *For a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment (g).* So, God is infinitely wise to time the execution of his own counsels. Being infinite in knowledge, he hath at once a perfect view of all the circumstances of things, so that he cannot be mistaken as to the proper season of bringing about his own purposes. *He hath made every thing beautiful in his time (h).* He hath an exact knowledge of times and seasons, and is infinitely wise to chuse the fittest. 4. Wisdom lies in acting judiciously and rationally. A wise man is not self-

(e) Rom. xi. 33.
(h) Eccl. iii. 11.

(f) Rom. xi. 36.

(g) Eccl. viii. 5.

self-willed, but is guided by right reason, and acts with judgment. So, God doth nothing but with reason and understanding. He is a God of judgment; and all his ways are judgment. His will is never without counsel. Hence it is called the counsel of his will (i).

But in attributing wisdom to God, there are two things we must advert unto. 1. We must remember that his wisdom is not a habit superadded to his essence, as it is in us; as if God were compounded of substance and qualities, as we are: For he is a most simple and uncompounded Being. But *his wisdom is the same with his essence. The wisdom of God is the wise God, or God acting wisely. All the perfections of God, though they seem diverse in our conceptions, are one and the same in him, and the same with his essence. 2. We must not think that God consults and deliberates, and reasons matters with himself, as men do, and so is determined to a choice of proper means, and of fit seasons and opportunities of acting: For this would imply ignorance and hesitation of mind antecedent to such consultation, and a change of will and purpose after it: And God hath no need of such deliberation and reasoning; for he hath at once a perfect view of all the means for effecting his own purposes, and of all the circumstances of things, so that he can never be at a loss what course he should take.

Second, I proceed to prove that God is wise; or, that wisdom is one of the excellencies and perfections of the divine nature. Though the proof of this needs not be insisted upon, yet it may be edifying to consider some scripture expressions about it. Wisdom is often attributed to God in the holy scriptures, and that under a variety of expressions. He is said to be wise in heart (k). This is spoken of God after the manner of men, in whom the heart is the seat of wisdom: So that the meaning is, he is perfectly and profoundly wise. Job doth also express himself thus, *With him is wisdom and strength* (l). Wisdom is with him, as its master and sovereign Lord; with him, as its sole Author and Proprietor. Again, Elihu tells us, *He is mighty in strength and wisdom* (m). The particle *and* is not in the original text; and so some interpreters understand the words thus, *He is mighty in the strength of wisdom, or mighty strong in wisdom*. So Daniel tells us, *Wisdom and might* are

(i) Isa. xxx. 18. Deut. xxxii. 4. Eph. i. 11.

* *Et quia in illa simplicitate non est aliud sapere quam esse, eadem ibi sapientia quæ essentia.* Aug. de Trin. L. 7. C. 1.

(k) Job. ix. 4. (l) Job. xii. 13. (m) Job xxxvi. 5.

are his (n). Wisdom is his peculiarly, his prerogative; it is the royalty of God. Hence the apostle cries out, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God* (o) ! There are *treasures of wisdom* in him (p). In him are all kinds and sorts of wisdom. Hence we read of *the manifold wisdom of God* (q). It is with reference to this divine perfection that *counsel* is attributed to God in scripture. *He hath counsel and understanding. My counsel shall stand*, says he. *He is wonderful in counsel* (r). Now, *counsel* is attributed to God, not properly as it is in us; for so it implies weakness and laborious deliberation: But it is ascribed to him in condescension to our capacity; to signify, that as these are the wisest acts in the creatures that are the results of deliberation and counsel; so God acts nothing but with reason and understanding. All his purposes are so contrived as is worthy of and becoming his glorious Majesty; and he hath infinitely wise reasons for all he doth. Therefore, as one observes *, "The wisdom of God" may be fitly called the *counsel-chamber* of heaven, where every thing is contrived, that is afterward wrought by his "power:" For *he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will* (s).

Thus we see that wisdom is attributed to God in scripture, as one of the excellencies of his nature: And it must needs be so for these reasons. 1. Because wisdom is a perfection; yea, the most noble and eminent perfection in any creature. It is a greater perfection than power: *Wisdom is better than strength* (t), says Solomon: Therefore it must be in God after an infinite manner. The highest perfection cannot be wanting to him who is infinitely perfect. 2. I argue from God's being the Supreme Governor of the world. As wisdom is necessary to fit men for government, so it must be a necessary perfection to him whose kingdom ruleth over all. As without wisdom he could not have made the world; so without it he could not govern the same. Certainly, he who hath an universal, independent government, must have an universal, independent wisdom. 3. All God's other perfections would be none without wisdom: They would be as a body without an eye, as a soul without understanding. His patience would be cowardice, his justice a tyranny, his power an oppression, without

(n) Dan. ii. 20. (o) Rom. xi. 33. (p) Col. ii. 3.
(q) Eph. iii. 10. (r) Job xii. 13. Isa. xlv. 10. and xxviii. 20.

* Flavel's Righteous Man's Refuge.

(s) Eph. i. 11. (t) Eccl. ix. 16.

without the conduct of wisdom. Without it they could not shine in a due lustre and brightness. Hence an eminent divine says, "Wisdom is the jewel in the ring of all the divine excellencies, and holiness is the splendor of that jewel *." 4. The wisdom of men and angels is derived from God as the Spring and Fountain of it. *He giveth wisdom to the wise (u).* Therefore he himself must be eminently wise: For, nothing can be in the effect which is not eminently in the cause. If he hath made creatures wise, he himself must be much more wise. 5. Even the Pagans, by nature's light, had a sense of this. They had this natural notion of God, that he is eminently wise. Plato therefore calls him *Mind or Understanding* †. Cleanthes used to call God *Reason*. And the name philosopher, which their learned men took to themselves, did arise from the regard they had to this transcendent perfection of God. They would not be called *Σοφοί*, that is, wise men; but *φιλοσοφί*, that is, lovers of wisdom. Both Pythagoras and Socrates thought the former too magnificent a title to be given unto any but God.

Third, I proceed to shew that God only is wise, in and what sense he is so. It is one of the divine royalties: It is peculiar to him alone. *As there is none good but God (x)*; so there is none wise but he. Even the heathen philosopher Plato asserts § wisdom to be a thing of that excellency, that it cannot properly be attributed to any but God. All creatures are but fools in comparison. Solomon, who excelled in wisdom, was but a poor fool to God. *The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God: And the foolishness of God is wiser than men (y).* Angels excel men in wisdom (z): Yet there is no proportion between their wisdom and God's; so that it is as nothing in his sight; it is but folly comparatively to his: *His angels he chargeth with folly (a).* Though they are not chargeable with actual or absolute folly, yet they are chargeable with potential and comparative folly. God differs infinitely from all creatures in his wisdom. For,

1. He is essentially wise. He is so by his essence. Yea, his wisdom is his very essence. He is wisdom itself: It is his very nature. He can as soon cease to be God, as cease to be most wise.

2. He is independently wise. He that borrows his wisdom from another, cannot properly be called wise: And such

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* Charnock on the Attributes.

† *Nos.*§ Plato in *Phæd.*

(u) Dan. ii. 21.

(x) Matth. xix. 17.

(y) 1 Cor. iii. 19.

1 Cor. i. 25.

(z) 2 Sam. xiv. 20.

(a) Job iv. 18.

is the wisdom of all the creatures; it is but borrowed. But God doth not derive his wisdom from any other; and it is not the birth of study, nor the fruit of experience: But he hath it in and of himself. He never goeth out of himself to learn wisdom, nor doth he receive counsel from any. *With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment (b)?* With what man or angel, with what politician did he ever consult? He is infinitely above and beyond all instruction, advice or counsel from any.

3. He is perfectly wise. The greatest wits among men are not without some mixture of madness. But there is no defect in the wisdom of God. It is beautiful, without any deformity. The wisdom of men and angels is but a faint shadow of it. Wisdom is in him in the most absolute perfection.

4. He is infinitely wise. We cannot set bounds and limits to his wisdom, and say, He is so wise, and no more. Nothing can be added to it. The greatest wisdom among men is increased by experience, and furthered by instruction and exercise; but the wisdom of God is not capable of any addition. He cannot be more wise than he is. The experience of so many thousand years in the government of the world, hath added nothing to the immensity of his wisdom.

5. He is immutably wise. He can never lose his wisdom, nor have it impaired in the least. The wisest of men are not wise at all times. The wisdom of man is often lost by dotage; and the minds of some who excelled in wisdom have been darkened with folly; as Nebuchadnezar. But the wisdom of God is ever with him. *With him is wisdom and strength (c).* Wisdom is with him; it is inseparable from his nature. He is not variable in his counsel; *it it stands for ever, and to all generations (d);* it is unmoveable like a rock. Hence we read *of the immutability of his counsel (e).*

6. He is universally wise. Some are wise in one kind of employment and business, and some in another. But God is wise in all his contrivances and purposes, and wise in all his executions; wise in all his ways, and in all his works, both of creation and providence. None can charge him with rashness or a defect of his wisdom in any of his proceedings. The wisest men sometimes slip, and sleep like the foolish virgins: The fairest copy that ever was written by men had some blemishes in it. But all God's works are done in the depth of wisdom: For he wills and works all by counsel; he *worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (f).*

7. He

(b) Isa. xl. 14. (c) Job xii. 13. (d) Psal. xxxiii. 11. (e) Heb. vi. 17. (f) Eph. i. 11.

7. He is originally wise. He is the Fountain of all created wisdom. The wisdom of men and angels is but a drop from this ocean: For *he giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding* (g). He only is wise, because all wisdom is originally in him, and derived from him. Spiritual wisdom is from him. Hence the apostle exhorts, *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God* (h). Political wisdom, wisdom for government, is from him. Solomon's wisdom was the gift of the Most High. Artificial wisdom owns him as the Fountain. All arts among men are rays of divine wisdom shining on them. Bezaleel's wisdom for embroidery, and devising curious works, was the gift of God (i). Yea, the wisdom of the husbandman is from God. *His God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him*: And having spoken of some parts of the husbandman's wisdom, he adds, *This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working* (k). So that all wisdom is originally from God. All candles are lighted at this torch. He is *the Father of lights* (l). To him we owe all the light and wisdom we have.

8. He is incomprehensibly wise. The deepest heads among men are but shallow; but the wisdom of God is an unsearchable depth. Hence the apostle cries out, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God* (m)! There are riches of wisdom, and a depth in these riches, and such a depth as is to be admired but cannot be comprehended; a depth that none can fathom. The psalmist adores God for this, *Thy thoughts are very deep* (n). None can dive into the depth of divine wisdom. No created understanding can conceive how wise he is. We read of *secrets of wisdom* (o). There are unsearchable depths of wisdom even in the ways and works of God, such secrets of wisdom as the wisest of men never saw: How much less can we comprehend God's essential wisdom.

S E R M O N XX.

Fourth, **I** GO on to shew wherein the wisdom of God doth appear. It appears, 1. In the work of creation. 2. In the government of the world. 3. And especially, in our redemption by Christ.

1. In

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| (g) Dan. ii. 21. | (h) James i. 5. | (i) Exod. xxxi. 3. |
| (k) Isa. xxviii. 26, 29. | (l) James i. 17. | (m) Rom. xi. 33. |
| (n) Psal xcii. 5. | (o) Job xi. 6. | |

1. In the work of creation. There is no creature so mean but glitters with a beam of divine wisdom. Hence the psalmist cries out, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works : In wisdom hast thou made them all (a)*. His wisdom shines in the frame both of the heavens and of the earth. The psalmist owns, that *by wisdom he made the heavens (b)* : And Solomon tells us, that *by wisdom he hath founded the earth ; by understanding hath he established the heavens (c)*. And, says the prophet, *He hath made the earth by his power ; he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion (d)*. Hence, he is called the *Builder* of the heavens (e). The word signifies, an artifice or curious builder, a builder by art. The world is not a work of chance, but of counsel and rare contrivance. Hence is that lofty description of God, *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand ? And meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance (f) ?* All things are disposed by number, weight, and measure, according to the eternal ideas in God's own mind. All is done in exact proportion ; so that there is a wonderful and ravishing beauty. On this account some of the ancient heathens framed the images of their gods with musical instruments in their hands, to signify that God had wrought all things in a due proportion. Particularly, the wisdom of God in creation appears, in the comely variety of the creatures he hath made ; in their admirable beauty and order ; in the fitness of every creature to its proper end and use, so that nothing is unprofitable ; and in the subordination of one creature to another for one common end, though they are endued with contrary qualities. Indeed, the wisdom of God in creation is above our reach. We may say with respect to this, *No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end (g)*. We have some little glimpses of his wisdom in creation, that we may admire and praise : But we cannot discern all the beauty and order of it. O the rare and wonderful contrivance !

2. In the government of the world. There are depths of wisdom in the ways of God, which we cannot fathom. That text is to be chiefly understood of the wisdom of God in his ways towards men ; *Canst thou by searching find out God ? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection (h) ?* God hath infinitely

(a) Psal. civ. 24. (b) Psal. cxxxvi. 5. (c) Prov. iii. 19.
 (d) Jer. x. 12. (e) Heb. xi. 10. (f) Isa. xl. 12. (g) Eccl.
 iii. 11. (h) Job xi. 7.

ly wise reasons for all he doth ; but his reasons are unsearchable by us. The rays of infinite wisdom are too bright and dazzling for our weakness ; and the secrets thereof too deep for us to wade into. Even in the works of common providence, there are many things that pose and gravel the understanding of man.

I shall give instance of some things in God's government wherein his wisdom is most illustrious. As,

(1.) In the various inclinations, gifts and abilities of men for the good of human society, and without which the corporation of mankind would be a mere chaos. Particularly, it appears in endowing men with wisdom and ability for rare contrivances and witty inventions, whence great profit and pleasure hath arisen unto men. Hence *Christ* the *personal wisdom* of God is brought in speaking, *I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions* (i).

(2.) In bringing glory to himself and good to his people out of sin, that evil of evils, which in its own nature tends to supplant his glory, and to ruin the creature. He wisely ordered Adam's fall to such an end, as man never dreamed of, and the devil never imagined ; to wit, a full discovery of his grace and mercy in our redemption by Christ. And the the sins and corruptions of the children of God, are ordered by infinite wisdom for their good ; to make them more humble and watchful, to drive them to Christ, to raise their esteem of him, and of the great salvation purchased by him, and to make them long for perfect blessedness in heaven.

(3.) In the work of conversion ; especially in the manner of it. It is God's promise to Israel, *Behold I will allure her* (k). Or, as the word may be rendered, *I will deceive or beguile her*. Hence the gospel, which is the ordinary mean of conversion, is called *the wisdom of God* (l). There is infinite wisdom and skill in grace's way, to counterwork the stratagems of Satan, and the deceits of the flesh ; to work upon the heart without wronging the natural faculties ; and to suit the key to all the wards of the lock, so as none of them may be disordered. And there is infinite wisdom in God's bringing in sinners in such ways as are suited to their natural tempers and dispositions : The stubborn he tears like a lion ; the gentle he wins by sweetness.

(4.) In guiding and conducting his people in all the passages of their lives, in all their straits and difficulties, and in

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all

(i) Prov. viii. 12.

(k) Hos. ii. 14.

(l) 1 Cor. ii. 7.

all their dangers, and bringing them all safe to glory at last. As the skill of a pilot is seen in bringing a ship safe to harbour, notwithstanding of many dangers : So, when we consider the many dangers that are in the way of the children of God, what rocks there are on every hand of them, and what hazard they are in every hour, of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience ; it is admirable to think how they are guided. But there is infinite wisdom in the way with them. His wisdom appears in leading and guiding them in the way of duty, when they are at loss in their own thoughts, and know not what to do ; in counterworking the stratagems of a subtle devil, and the wiles of a deceitful heart ; in measuring out their comforts for them ; in giving seasonable supplies of grace ; in suiting their temptations to their strength ; in giving seasonable relief under temptations, and opening a door for their escape. Whatever their trials and temptations be, yet he is never at a loss as to ways and methods for their help and relief. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations (m).* And he is infinitely wise to accommodate his help and relief to the various necessities and conditions of his people.

(5.) In the afflictions he allots unto his people. As, 1. In ordering afflictions when they most need them, and their abuse of prosperity calls aloud for them. *They are in heaviness through manifold temptations only if need be (n) :* So that their afflictions are most necessary and seasonable. 2. In suiting their afflictions to their various lusts, and to their different tempers and dispositions. Afflictions are God's physic ; and he is infinitely wise to mingle and temper the potion, to the various conditions of his people. *God is faithful who will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it (o).* Divers lusts have divers remedies ; and God knows how to strike in the right vein. 3. In the gracious issues of the sharpest afflictions he allots them. He brings meat out of the eater, and out of the strong he brings forth sweetness. So, *the heads of leviathan, became meat to them inhabiting the wilderness (p).* God out-wits Satan, by bringing light out of darkness, and making poisons to become medicines. He sanctifies the afflictions of his people, to strengthen their faith, confirm their hope, fortify their patience, and make them more holy. *All things work together for good to them that love God (q).*

(6.) In

(m) 2 Pet. ii. 9. (n) 1 Pet. i. 7. (o) 1 Cor. x. 13. (p) Psal. lxxiv. 14. (q) Rom. viii. 28.

(6.) In the wonderful deliverances he sometimes works for his church and people. As, 1. In the admirable manner in which deliverances are sometimes brought about. There is a depth of wisdom in his way. 2. In the season of the deliverance. He sometimes delivers his church, when she is on the brink of ruin, and her danger in all human appearance unavoidable: As in queen Esther's time. He sometimes delivers in such a season wherein his people least expect it, so that they are surprised therewith. Hence the church says, *When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream* (r). 3. In raising up, fitting and qualifying instruments for this work. Thus, Moses, a man learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and who had the advantage of a generous and princely education, was raised up to be the deliverer of God's people, and to be their head and captain. 4. In disappointing the projects of enemies in the height of their hopes, and ruining them by their own enterprizes, *The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands* (s). *He scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts* (t). Sometimes ruin seizeth upon enemies by these very means by which they thought to bring it upon the church.

3. The wisdom of God doth chiefly appear in our redemption by Christ. When man had ruined himself by sin, the wisdom of men and angels could never have devised any possible way of salvation. But when this puzzled and nonplused all finite understandings, infinite Wisdom found out the way, to wit, that the eternal Son of God should assume our nature, and by his obedience and sufferings in that nature, satisfy Divine Justice, and purchase for us all spiritual and eternal blessings; and that we should be interested in all this by faith in him. Here is a conjunction of excellent ends and excellent means. As there cannot be a more noble end, than the glory of God in the salvation of lost sinners; so there cannot be a more admirable means, than God manifest in the flesh. This is *the wisdom of God in a mystery* (u): A thing more sublime than all the secrets in the creation. Here, death is made the way to life, and shame the way to glory, and the cross the way to the crown; so that the rare contrivance is admirable. The very angels desire to pry into this mystery (x). Yet are they not able to search it to the bottom, or to tell over

(r) Psal. cxxvi. 1.

(s) Psal. ix. 16.

(t) Luke i. 51.

(u) 1 Cor. ii. 7.

(x) 1 Pet. i. 12.

Over the treasures of wisdom which are in it. Here the treasures of wisdom are opened. Hence, Christ is called *the wisdom of God* (y). Here is a *hidden wisdom*, and *wisdom in a mystery* (z). The wisdom of God in redemption is truly mysterious and incomprehensible. The wisdom of men and angels is not able to unfold it. It is a wisdom as manifold as mysterious. Hence it is called *the manifold wisdom of God* (a). There is a variety in this mystery, and a mystery in every part of the variety. The word in the original rendered *manifold*, denoteth a thing that hath a curious variety in it, like a piece of embroidery. The wisdom of God in redemption is an embroidered wisdom, wherein there is all variety of rich and curious contrivances.

Thus I have shewed, in some measure, how the wisdom of God appears, in the work of creation; in God's government of the world, especially his gracious government; and most of all in our redemption by Christ. Yet all that is discovered or manifested of God's infinite wisdom, is but little in comparison of what is in him. Let it be considered, that we cannot find out even the wisdom of God in his works: We may find it out sufficiently for our instruction, but it cannot be found out to perfection. Yet all the wisdom of God in his works is infinitely less than what is in himself. The secrets of wisdom in God, are double to the expressions of it in his works. This seems to be the meaning of that expression, *And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is* (b). God hath not stamped all his wisdom upon any thing that he hath done. He hath a stock and store of wisdom by him, that no creature ever looked into, or is capable of finding out. *In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (c).

Fifth, Follows the application of this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction. In several particulars.

Instr. 1. Is God only wise? Then he must needs be unchangeable in his decrees and purposes. If he did change, it must either be to the worse, and so he would not be wise in his present purpose; or to the better, and so he was not wise in his former purpose. There can be no blots or blemishes in the counsels of infinite Wisdom, to move him to any change. Hence, the immutability of his counsel is often asserted in scripture. *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure* (d). *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thoughts*

(y) 1 Cor. i. 24.

(z) 1 Cor. ii. 7.

(a) Eph. iii. 10.

(b) Job xi. 6.

(c) Col. ii. 3.

(d) Isa. xli. 10.

thoughts of his heart to all generations (e). There are many devices in a man's heart : Nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand (f). There can be no disappointments to make God change his counsels. No craft or policy of the creature can undermine them. There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord (g). His infinite wisdom is a bar to any change. Hence the prophet says, Yet he also is wise, and will not call back his words (h).

Instr. 2. Is God infinitely wise ? Then he doth nothing in vain. That is in vain, which hath no good end or use ; and it is in vain to do more than is convenient for the end designed : But none of these can be imagined of the infinitely wise God ; for he doth nothing, but he hath infinitely wise ends in it, and reasons for it.

Instr. 3. We may see here the great happiness of believers in Christ. He who is their God by covenant, is *the only wise God*. He is infinitely wise, to counsel, direct, and guide them continually, to out-wit and undermine their crafty and subtle enemies, and to manage all their concerns to his own glory and their good. He is infinitely wise to communicate all good to them, and prevent all evil ; and hath infinite ways to bring to pass his gracious intentions toward them : So that they are unspeakably happy in an interest in him.

Instr. 4. See here the great folly of the most subtle and politic enemies of the church. They think they act wisely in plotting mischief against the church : But this their way is their folly ; for they set themselves against *the God of Zion*, who is *the only wise God* ; so that they labour in vain. He is *wise in heart, and mighty in strength : who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered (i) ?* All their subtle devices, plots, and counsels, are but a preparation to their own ruin. Hence the prophet triumphs over the church's enemies ; *Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces. — Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought : Speak the word, and it shall not stand ; for God is with us (k).* Crafty enemies do but make halters and dig pits for themselves. *The stone cut out of the mountain without hands (l), shall dash in pieces all worldly power and policy.*

Use 2. For reproof. Is it so, that wisdom is one of the properties and excellencies of God, and that he is *the only wise God* ? Then,

1. Here

(e) Psal. xxxiii. 11. (f) Prov. xix. 21. (g) Prov. xxi. 30. 30. (h) Isa. xxxi. 2. (i) Job ix. 4. (k) Isa. viii. 9, 10. (l) Dan. ii. 44, 45.

1. Here is ground of reproof to such as do not reverence the infinite wisdom of God, and will not submit to it. When you are peremptory for your own will, and wish or pray for any thing, without a due submission to the will and pleasure of God; this is to dictate to infinite Wisdom, as if ye were God's counsellors, and wiser than he. When you are peremptory in your desires after such mercies, such a lot and condition in the world; O that I had such and such things, or that I were in such and such circumstances: In such cases, you encroach upon infinite wisdom, and would direct God how to dispose of you.

2. Here is ground of reproof to them that invade the infinite wisdom of God, by bold and curious inquiries into things secret, and which God would not have them to know, *intruding into these things which they have not seen (m)*. When you search curiously into such things, the knowledge whereof God hath reserved to himself; this is an ambition to be of God's council: You affect a wisdom equal with God. This was the sin of our first parents: They affected a forbidden wisdom: And from them is this original evil transmitted to us. *Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild asses' colt (n)*. Men do naturally desire forbidden wisdom, and the more that is forbidden. They would be wise beyond their line, as if they knew nothing worthy of a man, unless they know what is only proper to God.

S E R M O N XXI.

3. **H**ERE also is ground of reproof to them that reproach and affront the infinite wisdom of God, and do plainly pour contempt upon it. This is done several ways. As, 1. By despising and violating his laws. All the laws God hath given unto men are contrived by his wisdom for their happiness: Therefore, to break his laws, or to pick and chuse out of his commands what pleaseth yourselves, is to control his infinite wisdom, as if God were not wise enough to rule and govern you. When you prefer your own imaginations, and the ways of your own hearts, before the ways of *the only wise God*; this is to reproach the Lord, by proclaiming yourselves wiser than he. 2. By corrupting the worship of God with human inventions. When men will be adding something of their own or other mens invention to God's institutions, and patch up the ordinances of God with significant teaching

(m) Col. ii. 18.

(n) Job xi. 12.

teaching ceremonies devised by men; what is this, but to affront the wisdom of God, as if he had not been wise enough to provide for his own honour, and to prescribe the form of his own worship, but needed the wit and device of man. So much is implied in God's charging the Israelites with making idols *according to their own understanding (a)*, and imagining themselves wiser than God. 3. By neglecting God in our affairs and business. When you dare undertake any business without asking counsel and advice from God, and make your own wit your counsellor; this is a great contempt of God, as if you were as wise as himself, and had ability enough to direct yourselves, and had no need of his counsel. Hence it is that neglecting to seek God is taxed as a reflection on his wisdom: *They look not unto the holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord: Yet he also is wise (b)*. 4. By setting up reason as judge of divine revelation. Ever since man did eat of the forbidden fruit, his reason hath a malignant pride in it, and will fall a judging divine mysteries, and reject as spurious what it cannot comprehend. This hath been a fruitful mother of heresies in all ages. It hath, especially in the Socinians, blown up the most fundamental principles of Christianity. A certain Socinian lays down this for a rule, † *That cannot be believed by faith, which cannot be comprehended by reason*. Hence they reject the holy Trinity as a contradiction, and the union of the two natures in Christ as a repugnancy. But how base is it to set up a finite corrupted reason, against an infinite and incomprehensible wisdom? When men presume to censure divine revelations, it implies a conceit that they are wiser than God. 5. By censuring God in his ways of providence. When we take upon us to measure the ways of God by our finite understandings, and will not wait for the end of the Lord in his present dispensations, but will judge of them according to outward appearance, and are apt to find fault with his proceedings, because we do not see or know the reasons of them; this is an affront to his infinite wisdom. What arrogance is it to censure or find fault with an infinitely wise Being, and to cite him to answer at our bar! 6. By impatience, discontent, and murmuring under crosses and afflicting dispensations. You reproach the infinitely wise God, when you complain of his dealings with you, and fret and repine against him, as if you had more wit to order your lot than he hath. When you give

Nihil credi potest quod a ratione capi & intelligi nequeat.

Cited by Polhil of Faith. C. 3.

(a) Hos. iii. 2.

(b) Isa. xxxi. 1, 2.

give way to impatience, because God's dispensations toward you do not answer your desires and wishes, this is a presuming to instruct him, and a reproving him, as if he wanted skill how to deal with you : And *shall he that contendeth with the Almighty, instruct him ? He that reproveth God, let him answer it (c).*

Use 3. For exhortation. In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Reverence and adore this infinitely wise Majesty. We honour and reverence wise men; and should we not much honour and reverence *the only wise God*, in comparison of whom the greatest wisdom among men is but folly ? O, labour to get and entertain honourable and reverend thoughts and apprehensions of him, and a raised admiration of the excellency of his being.

Exhort. 2. Get an interest in this God as your God. Let this commend him to you, that he is *the only wise God*. O what a happiness will it be to have him for your God ! When he is your God, he will then be yours in all the glorious perfections of his nature, and particularly in this of his wisdom. His wisdom will be yours, to conduct you through all difficulties, to out-wit all your spiritual enemies, to give you all that you need in due season, and to guide you safe to glory at last. If left to yourselves, you will ruin and undo yourselves : But, O what a happiness is it to be under the conduct and guidance of infinite wisdom ? Therefore, let it be your great business to get him for your God. And, for this end, chuse him for your God in Christ : For as he cannot be yours but by your own choice, so you cannot have him for your God but in and through the blessed Mediator. And if you would have the Lord for your God, you must be content to take him for your Guide, and say to him, *My Father, thou art the guide of my youth (d).* As he will not be your God, so you do not own him as such, unless you take him for your Guide. *For this God is our God for ever and ever : he will be our Guide even unto death (e).*

Exhort. 3. Is the Lord the only wise God ? Then resign yourselves absolutely to his whole will in all things. 1. Resign yourselves to his commanding will. All the commands of God are highly rational, and drawn from the depths of infinite wisdom. They are not acts of mere will, but fruits of counsel. Hence divine commands are sometimes called *counsels*. God is infinitely wise, and knows how to govern you, and what to enjoin you and advise you to, for his glory and your own good and

(c) Job xl. ii. (d) Jer. iii. 4. (e) Psal. xlviii. 14.

and happiness. Therefore resign yourselves to his will, that he may require of you what he pleases: And resign yourselves to his whole will, without any reservation; for it is folly, and a disgrace to infinite wisdom, to make any reserve. 2. Resign yourselves to his disposing will; that he may carve out your lot for you, and dispose of you and yours, and lead and guide you in what way he pleaseth. Lean not to your own understanding, but resign yourselves to the disposal of infinite Wisdom. *Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established (f)*. Leave it to him to order your condition, and to manage all your affairs. Being infinitely wise, his will is the highest wisdom and reason. He knows what is good and fit for you better than you do yourselves*. Therefore resign yourselves and all that is yours to God's wise disposal, to hold them, or part with them, as he shall determine, resolving through grace to welcome any dispensation, how cross soever it may be to your own desires and inclinations. In this imitate David's example; *Behold, here am I*, says he, *let him do to me, as seemeth good unto him (g)*. Put yourselves in his will, that he may turn you into any condition he pleaseth, that may be most for his glory and your good; for he is the only wise God.

Exhort. 4. Often contemplate the wisdom of God in these discoveries he hath given of it. It is certainly against your interest as well as your duty, to neglect the manifestations God hath given of himself. He hath given full discoveries of his wisdom, in his works both of creation and providence. Therefore study the creatures, and study providence, and observe what characters of his wisdom he hath left upon them. This is noble and suitable employment for any rational creature. Especially study and admire the wisdom of God as it shines forth in the glorious work of redemption. Even the glorious angels are ravished with the study of it; and shall not we be at more pains who are more deeply interested in it?

The serious and attentive contemplation of the wisdom of God in his works, is an exercise both pleasant and profitable.

1. It is a most pleasant exercise. It is a pleasure to men of reason to behold any wise contrivance: But there is such a depth of wisdom discovered in the works of God, especially in the work of redemption, that the serious contemplation thereof

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cannot

(f) Prov. xvi. 3.

* *Quid prodest, medicus novit, non agrotus.* Aug. Serm. 53.

(g) 2. Sam. xv. 26.

cannot but yield an inexpressible pleasure. The contemplation of the wisdom of God in his works, as it will be the exercise of the mind to eternity, so it will yield and increase a continual delight; therefore there must needs be a proportionable pleasure in such contemplations here in this life. This is to begin heaven upon earth. No doubt the model of divine wisdom will be fully opened in heaven: *In God's light we shall see light (b)*: Even all the light in creation, government, and redemption.

2. It is a most profitable exercise. For, 1. It will increase humility. When we find the wisdom of God in his works incomprehensible to us, what mean thoughts will we then have of ourselves? How readily will we acknowledge our wisdom to be as nothing, and that we are indeed but dark and foolish creatures? When wise Augur contemplated the discoveries of God in his works, all conceit of his own wisdom vanished (*i*). 2. It will raise and promote a high and reverend esteem of God. As it raiseth our esteem of a wise artist to view all the draughts of a curious piece of workmanship; so when we view these characters of divine wisdom that are impressed upon the ways and works of God, we cannot but cry out, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord!* 3. It will be a spur to worship, and particularly to the highest and greatest part of worship, that part which shall remain in heaven, the admiration and praise of God, and delight in him. By serious contemplations of the wisdom of God in his works, we shall find fresh springs of new wonders, which we cannot but adore with holy astonishment, and cry out with the apostle, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (k)!* And with the psalmist, *O Lord, how great are thy works! And thy thoughts are very deep (l)*. More especially, serious thoughts of the wisdom of God in redemption cannot but produce in you, who are the children of God, affectionate admirations and thanksgivings for that which is so full of wonders, and make you break forth in such a doxology as that in my text, *To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

Exhort. 5. Is God only wise? Then study to be denied to your own wisdom, the wisdom of the flesh, carnal wisdom and policy. It is natural to all men to lean to their own wisdom. There is no sinner but is like Solomon's sluggard,
Wiser

(b) Psal. xxxvi. 9. (i) Prov. xxx. 2, 3, 4. (k) Rom. xi. 33.
(l) Psal. xcii. 5.

Wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason (m). And this is especially incident to men of great parts, who have a high claim to the exercise of reason. *Vain men will be wise (n).* But it is a necessary piece of self-denial, to be denied to your own wisdom. For, 1. This is what the Lord requires. *Lean not to thine own understanding. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Cease from thine own wisdom (o).* 2. Trusting to your own wisdom is most dishonourable to God. It is spiritual idolatry. It is a deifying yourselves, and making your own bosom your oracle. 3. Your own wisdom is insufficient to direct and guide you. *The way of man is not in himself: It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (p).* Your own wisdom is but an empty lamp: Therefore it is great folly to trust in it. *He that is wise in his own eyes is twice a fool **; by having but a little wisdom, and by his great conceit of it. 4. It is most dangerous to lean to your own wisdom. It oft-times proves very hurtful, and runs men into many inconveniences. That man that follows the dictates of his own wisdom, will chuse a mischief to himself instead of a comfort and blessing. † Carnal wisdom leads men into sinful courses and soul-destroying precipices. Ever since the fall, by which man got a crack in his head, *our own wisdom and knowledge hath perverted us (q).* Our own wisdom is a blind guide, a traitor and enemy to God and ourselves. *The carnal mind is enmity against God (r).* Mens' idolizing their own wit hath been the usual rise of heresy. Carnal wisdom is blind in spirituals: It reckons that folly, which indeed is true wisdom: To be precise and strict in religion, to suffer for the name of Christ, to quit visible conveniencies for invisible rewards, to renounce present delights and advantages, to mortify carnal affections; all this is folly in the judgment of carnal wisdom. Hence it is, that no man is ruined here, or damned hereafter, but by his own wisdom and will. Why then will you take your own wisdom for your guide? Who would chuse him for a pilot that sinks every vessel that he governs? 5. God delights to cross men in following the dictates of their own wisdom. *He maketh foolish the wisdom of this world (s).* Such as have had a high conceit of their own wisdom, have at last proved

(m) Prov. xxvi. 16. (n) Job xi. 12. (o) Prov. iii. 5, 7. Prov. xxiii. 4. (p) Jer. x. 23.

* *Bis desipit, qui sibi sapit.*

† *Sapientes sapienter in infernum descendunt.* Hieron.

(q) Isa. xlvii. 10. (r) Rom. viii. 7. (s) 1 Cor. i. 20.

proved the greatest fools. God wrote folly on the crafty counsels of Haman, Achitophel, and Jeroboam. Carnal wisdom never prospers. Many times, when we think to bring about our ends and designs by our own counsels, behold all our devices and fine contrivances are gone, like a cobweb, with the turn of a besom, and our wisdom is turned into folly.

Yea, you must be denied even to sanctified wisdom. It must not puff you up, nor take you off from your dependence on God. To trust in it, is a great contempt of God, and a taking his work out of his hands. God is jealous of your trust; for trust is an acknowledgment of his sovereignty, and sets the crown on his head; therefore it is a plain denial of him, to place it any where else.

Exhort. 6 Study to be like God in wisdom. Our blessed Lord exhorts, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect (t)*. We should study to resemble God in all his imitable perfections, and particularly in his wisdom. Seek true wisdom, that you may be like God. But seek chiefly after holy and spiritual wisdom, that wisdom which is from above, heavenly wisdom, to be wise unto salvation, and wise unto that which is good. In this you will most resemble God. When you propose to yourselves the most noble and worthy end, the glorifying God and the enjoyment of him; and chuse the most fit and proper means for attaining that end, taking God's word for your rule and directory; and are vigorous and earnest in pursuing the means for that end: This is that holy and heavenly wisdom by which you will most resemble the infinitely wise God. That is true wisdom, to be diligent and laborious in the work of your salvation, to be careful and punctual in your obedience to God. Hence Moses exhorts the children of Israel, *Keep therefore and do these statutes; for this is your wisdom (u)*. This is God's voice to the children of men, as Job hath told us: *And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (x)*. The preacher tells us, *That a wise man's heart is at his right hand (y)*. The right hand is the chief instrument of action: So that the plain meaning is, a wise man is hard at work, diligent and laborious in the great work that God hath given him to do. This is that wisdom which I recommend to you. Consider, 1. We are naturally destitute of this wisdom. It is said of the prodigal,

(t) Matth. v. 48. (u) Deut. vi. 4. (x) Job xxviii. 28.
(y) Eccl. x. ii.

digal, when he came to himself, he said, &c (a). He was beside himself before, like a mad-man or one out of his wits. Men are naturally foolish in what concerns their eternal salvation (b). 2. Consider the necessity of this wisdom. We read of being wise unto salvation (c). Without holy and heavenly wisdom, ye will never take the right way to salvation. Other wisdom will be hurtful to you without this. The apostle tells us, That the world by wisdom knew not God (d). Other wisdom, without this, will enable you to do the more mischief, and lead you into mad and foolish courses. The sharpest unsanctified wits have always been the devil's greatest tools. 3. Consider the excellency of holy wisdom. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom (e). All the treasures in the world cannot equal it (f). It is a wisdom from above (g), of a heavenly descent and original. It will commend you to God, and be your honour before men. It is an excellent ornament. It is like precious ointment that makes the face to shine (h). It will teach you to escape the snares of hell and death, and to secure your great and eternal interest. Well then, let this holy and heavenly wisdom be your chief study: And that you may attain to it, go to God for it. This leads me to

S E R M O N XXII.

Exhort. 7. **G**O to this only wise God for wisdom. Study alone, or experience alone, will not make you wise. God is the original Spring and Fountain of all true wisdom. All wisdom is originally in him, and derivatively from him. Wisdom and skill in your manual employments, such as the husbandman hath (a): Wisdom in embroidery and other curious arts, such as Bazaleel had: Wisdom for government, such as Solomon had: Wisdom to manage your worldly affairs and business: All is from God (b). But especially holy and heavenly wisdom is to be had only from him. The wisdom that was the glory of Solomon was the gift of God. Job moves the question, *But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of the living (c).* No creature hath it in his keeping or at his disposing: That is God's prerogative. *With him is wisdom and strength (d),*
Wisdom

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| (a) Luke xv. 17. | (b) Tit. iii. 3. | (c) 2 Tim. iii. 16. |
| (d) 1 Cor. i. 21. | (e) Prov. iv. 7. | (f) Job xxviii. 16. |
| (g) James iii. 17. | (h) Eccl. viii. 1. | |
| (a) Isa. xxviii. 26. | (b) Psal. cxii. 5. | (c) Job xxviii. 12, |
| 13. | (d) Job xii. 13. | |

Wisdom is with him as a Lord and Steward, to give it out as, and to whom, he pleaseth.

Well then, in seeking true wisdom see that you do not neglect God; come and fill your cistern from this pure Fountain. But especially seek from him holy and heavenly wisdom. And, 1. Seek it by prayer. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God (e).* Pray much for *the Spirit of wisdom (f).* Solomon's wisdom was gotten by prayer (g). 2. Seek it humbly. Self-conceited professors do not speed with God. Therefore come to God sensible of, and bewailing your folly. 3. Seek it in Christ. He is *made of God to us wisdom (h).* Come to God through the blessed Mediator: Rest and rely on him, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (i). 4. Seek it in the use of his blessed word; for that is the transcript of divine wisdom. The holy scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation (k). The psalmist had his wisdom by the means of the word. *Thou, says he, through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies, for they are ever with me: And through thy precepts I get understanding (l).* If you slight and neglect the written word, you must needs be void of true wisdom. Hence the prophet says, *They have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them (m)?*

Exhort 8. Go to this only wise God for direction and counsel on all occasions. When we are at a loss in our own thoughts, and know not what to do, we go to some wise person for counsel; but how much more should you go to a God of infinite wisdom. *In all thy ways acknowledge him (n).* Seek counsel from God in all your ways; but especially in your more weighty affairs, and in intricate and perplexed cases. The very light of nature binds this duty upon you. Even the poor Pagans used to begin with their gods in any weighty enterprize. That was an honest principle among the Heathens, *Let us begin with God †.* And the Greeks commonly used to say, *With the leave and blessing of God ‡,* in the beginning of any undertaking. What a shame will it be if professed Christians suffer themselves to be outstript by Heathens and Pagans in this matter? Moreover, consider, 1. You have absolute need of God's counsel. *For the way of man is not in himself (o).* If left to yourselves, you will surely go wrong, and

(e) James i. 5.	(f) Eph. i. 17.	(g) 1 Kings iii. 9.
(h) 1 Cor. i. 30.	(i) Col. ii. 3.	(k) 2 Tim. iii. 15.
(l) Psal. cxix. 98, 104.	(m) Jer. viii. 9.	(n) Prov. iii. 6.
† <i>A Jovis principium.</i>	‡ <i>Συν Θεω</i>	(o) Jer. x. 23.

and wander in bye-paths. And other men are insufficient to give you counsel, the wisest men being subject to mistakes. Therefore it is best to go to the fountain, and not to content yourselves with the streams. 2. God is infinitely wise, and can give counsel infallibly. He is *great in counsel* (p); and so can advise you in every case. It is a great encouragement, that you have a God of infinite wisdom to go to, who is every way skilful to manage any business for you, and to give you counsel in the darkest cases. He can *make darkness light before you* (q). 3. It is dangerous to neglect God. For, if you do not own God, you cannot expect that he will own you, but leave you to yourselves. He may suffer you to fall into precipitant counsels that may ruin and undo you; or he may blast your good counsels, though never so wisely laid: For he *turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish* (r). 4. Your owning God, and going to him for counsel, will have blessed success. To this the promise is made: *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths* (s). When you go to God humbly, and in the sincerity of your heart, professing you know not how to direct your own way, and begging direction and counsel from him, then may you with confidence expect his counsel. And, O what happiness is it to be under his gracious and wise conduct! For, having him for your guide, you shall not miscarry in your way to glory, but be brought safely home to God. This the psalmist was confident of: *Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel*, says he, *and afterward receive me to glory* (t).

I say then, go to the only wise God for counsel; and that not only in doubtful and difficult cases, that are wholly above your wit, but in all your ways. Sometimes we are confident that we shall manage such a business well enough; but, alas, when we seem to be most wise, then are we most infatuated. Therefore, in all your ways, acknowledge God. In order hereunto, I give these directions. 1. Undertake nothing but that wherein you can with confidence interest God. Sometimes men engage in unlawful business, wherein they cannot with confidence go to God for counsel. And indeed in such cases, it would be the height of presumption to seek God's counsel, as if you meant to draw a holy God into a sinful confederacy with yourselves. Therefore, I say, engage in no affair or business but that wherein you dare with confidence interest

(p) Jer. xxxii. 19. (q) Isa. xlii. 16. (r) Isa. xlii. 25.
 (s) Prov. iii. 6. (t) Psal. lxxiii. 24.

interest God by seeking his counsel. 2. Take the word of God for your rule and directory. There he hath given you direction and counsel fully, and with respect to all cases. Study to be well acquainted with the mind and will of God revealed in the holy scriptures. Read them frequently, with reverence, attention, meditation and prayer, that this blessed word may dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (u). 3. Be much in prayer. Mr. Greenham, when one came to seek his advice in a certain business, answered, *Friend, you and I have not prayed yet.* O pray, pray that God would direct and guide you continually. Be frequent and fervent in prayer for this. Yea, all the day over, be looking up to God for direction and counsel as the psalmist did: *Lead me in thy truth, and teach me—On thee do I wait all the day* (x). 4. Go to God through Christ the Mediator: For he is the Counsellor (y). Study to live by faith in him; for he is given to you, to be your Shepherd, Leader, and Counsellor. Particularly, act faith on him in these and the like promises. *And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known, and will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them* (z). And that promise, *And the Lord shall guide thee continually* (a).

Exhort. 9. Trust in this infinitely wise God. His infinite and infallible wisdom is a strong foundation for trust. 1. Trust in him for the accomplishment of whatever he hath promised. He hath more wisdom than to promise any thing rashly or unadvisedly, or any thing which he cannot accomplish. As he is powerful, and can make good his promises; faithful, and will do it: So he is wise, and knows well how to do it, and to order all the means for the accomplishment. 2. Trust him with all your concerns. *Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established* (b). When you have left a business in the hand of a wise man, you rest on him with confidence, and your thoughts are composed; with how much more confidence and composure may you leave your concerns in the hand of the only wise God? He knows how to manage all. Trust him with the ordering and disposal of your lot: He is wiser than you, and knows best

(u) Col. iii. 16. (x) Psal. xxv. 5. (y) Isa. ix. vi. (z) Isa. xlii. 16.

(a) Isa. lvi. 1. (b) Psal. xxxvii. 5. Prov. xvi. 3.

best what is fit for you. 3. Trust him in the greatest extremities. To trust God, when your supplies are at hand, and no difficulty appears, is no great matter: But when there is but a handful of meal and a cruse of oil, and all ways of relief are stoppt, to trust in him then, is truly noble. Trust in him in your greatest dangers, difficulties, and perplexities. God brings you into straits, that he may see the exercise of your faith. Hence the Lord promises, *I will also leave in the midst of thee, an afflicted and poor people: and they shall trust in the name of the Lord* (c). He also doth so, that you may have more lively experiments of his tenderness in your seasonable relief. The infinitely wise God can contrive and order the way and means of your relief and deliverance, when all human hope is lost. Therefore, learn to answer every strait with that, *The Lord will provide*. Again, in the straits and distresses of the church: when subtle enemies contrive and plot mischief against her, so that she is in danger of ruin; we are apt to give way to unbelief, and our reason intrudes too far, and is apt to dictate too boldly in the case, Oh, how shall the church be delivered and preserved? But that is an excellent counsel in such a case, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding* (d).

To quicken and engage you to the exercise of this grace, consider, 1. You have great ground to trust in God. There are many men whose honesty we are confident of, but dare not rely on their wisdom and discretion: But God is infinitely wise to manage the whole course of nature, and dispose of all creatures, for bringing his gracious purposes and promises to pass. 2. Trusting in him is the way to engage him. The psalmist found it so in his experience, *My heart trusted in him, and I am helped* (e). Trusting in God honours and glorifies him; therefore he never did, and never will disappoint the regular expectations of such as trust in him. Hence the psalmist pleads it as an argument; *Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust*: And Asa; *Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee* (f). 3. This is the way to settle and establish your heart in the most troublesome times, times of great commotion. This is plain from what the psalmist says, *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid* (g). Trusting in God will free you of anxious tossings and disquiet-

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ments

(c) Zeph. iii. 12. (d) Prov. iii. 5. (e) Psal. xxviii. 7.
 (f) Psal. xvi. 1. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. (g) Psal. cxii. 7, 8.

ments of mind: For God will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him, because he trusteth in him (b).

Exhort. 10. Reverence and adore the infinite wisdom of God, and submit to it. The wisdom of God being incomprehensible, you should adore it, and submit to it, and that in all cases; for there is no case wherein God's acts are not directed by infinite wisdom. Particularly,

1. Submit your reason to divine revelation. Is your weak reason, that is nonplused and puzzled by many secrets in nature, strong enough to enter into the depths of divine mysteries? Is a blind corrupted reason fit to control the doctrines of infinite wisdom? The wisdom of God in the gospel is beyond your finite reach: Therefore gospel truths are to be received with self-emptiness, and reason must not lift up itself against divine revelation (i). The first work of grace is to captivate the pride of our thoughts and our prejudices against religion. Reason must be captivated to faith, though not to fancy.

2. Reverence and obey his will, though you do not know the reasons of it. All the commands of God are the results of infinite and infallible wisdom, and are therefore to be entertained with reverence, and obeyed without disputing. It is said of Abraham, *When he was called to go out unto a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went* (k). We owe the infinitely wise God blind and implicit obedience. When carnal reason steps in with objections, you should not dispute, but resolve.

3. Reverence and adore the only wise God in all his ways of providence. Take heed of censuring any of his ways. Do not cite him to answer at your bar. Shall infinite Wisdom be called to an account by foolish creatures? How absurd is this! God were not infinitely wise, if the reasons of all he doth were obvious to your shallow understanding. There are *secrets of wisdom* (l) above our reach. You pay such a reverence to wise men, to think they have good reasons for what they do, though you do not know them: And should you not much more give this honour to the infinitely wise God, to think that he hath wise reasons for what he doth, though your shallowness cannot comprehend them? Therefore, when you cannot comprehend the ways of God, it is your wisdom to be silent, and acquiesce in his proceedings. You should adore rather than censure, and admire that in God which you cannot comprehend.

More

(b) Isa. xxvi. 3. (i) 2 Cor. x. 5. (k) Heb. xi. 8. (l) Job xi. 6.

More particularly, I recommend these two things with respect to God's ways of providence. 1. Reverence and submit to the only wise God in timing your mercies and comforts. Being infinitely wise he knows fit times and seasons for mercy better than you do. *He is a God of judgment (m)*. When he seems to put you off, and to weary your expectation, he acts judiciously and rationally; he hath infinitely wise reasons for so doing. Therefore leave it to him to take his own time, and to moderate his own pace, as in his infinite wisdom he shall see meet and convenient. 2. Reverence and submit to his will in all cross and afflicting providences. When he afflicts you, he knows what he is doing, and hath infinitely wise reasons for it *. Therefore take heed of murmuring, impatience, discontent, when God's dealings with you do not answer your desires and wishes. Ye are like children, led by fancy more than by reason. But God is infinitely wise, and knows what is best for you, and how to carve out your lot for you. Therefore put a blank in his hand, and let him take what way with you he pleaseth; and reverence, adore and submit to him whatever way he take. Moreover, reverence *the only wise God* in the distresses and straits he brings his church into. Many times we wonder what God is doing, and vex ourselves with perplexing cares. But reverence and adore infinite Wisdom. *His path is in the dark waters, and his footsteps are not known (n)*. He sometimes worketh under ground, as wise politicians use to do: He worketh in the dark, where neither friends nor foes can behold him, or see what he is doing. With respect to this the prophet cries out, *Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour (o)*. He is often helping his church in an unseen way, which for the time is not visible to us. God is most in his way, when we think he is most out of it.

Use 4. For comfort to believers in Christ. How comfortable is it that *the only wise God* is your God? His wisdom is made over to you by covenant. Being infinitely wise he hath many ways for bringing to pass his gracious designs toward you. Particularly, the consideration of God's infinite wisdom may comfort you in these cases.

1. In all your difficulties and perplexities; when you are at a loss in your own thoughts, and know not what to do, or what

(m) Isa. xxx. 18.

* *Quid infirmo sit utilius, magis novit medicus quam agrotus.*

Aug. Lib. Sent. prosp.

(n) Psal. lxxvii. 19.

(o) Isa. xlv. 15.

what way to take. You have an infinitely wise God to direct, and guide you. He hath engaged himself by promise so to do: *The meek will be guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way: And, the Lord shall guide thee continually* (p). And as he hath promised to be your guide, so he hath infinite wisdom to fit and qualify him for it. There are rocks on every hand upon which you are ready to make shipwreck: But, how comfortable is it that you are under the conduct of Infinite Wisdom!

2. When you are involved in snares and beset with temptations. Your God is wise to out-wit Satan in his stratagems, and to baffle him in his enterprizes. He is wise, to suit temptations to your strength, that you may not be too hard put to it; and to open a door for your out-gate, when you are sore entangled, and see no evasion for you. *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it* (q). You are often at a loss, and know not how to be delivered; But *the only wise God* is never so. *The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations* (r).

3. Under afflictions. God's management of the rod is directed by infinite wisdom. He knows when to bring on affliction, and when to remove it again. He knows how to time your crosses, and how to measure out your comforts. And he is wise to make *all things work together for good* to you, and to extract *good* out of *evil* (s)? He can make these afflictions which destroy your outward comforts, consume your inward defilements. He can bring the glory of your salvation out of the depths of a seeming ruin.

4. Against the deep designs of the church's enemies. They are usually men of the finest parts and deepest policies, and vex the church with their wiles (t). But how crafty and subtle soever they be, yet they can never be wise enough to out-wit the God of Zion. Though their projects be never so deep, and their counsels never so crafty, yet *he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision* (u). The deepest heads among men are but shallow; but the wisdom of God is an unsearchable depth. The policy of carnal men is no better than folly with God. He can infatuate the counsels of men, and set a stamp of folly on their wit and policy, so that they shall *conceive chaff, and bring forth stubble* (x).

He

(p) Psal. xxv. 9. Isa. lviii. xi. (q) 1 Cor. x. 13. (r) 2 Pet. ii. 9. (s) Rom. viii. 28. (t) Numb. xxv. 18. (u) Psal. 2. 4. (x) Isa. xxiii. 11.

He can discover their most secret plots and clandestine contrivances against the church: For he discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death (y). He can defeat their most subtle contrivances, and disappoint their plots: For he disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong (z). He can make the crafty designs and contrivances of enemies return upon themselves, to their own shame and ruin; as he dealt with Haman. And what can he not do? He is the only wise God. Though the greatest politicians in the world lay their heads together against the church, they are no match for a God of infinite wisdom. He can and will maintain and preserve his church against all the power and policy of men and devils.

(y) Job xii. 22.

(z) Job. v. 12, 13.

DISCOURSE VI.

Of the Power of God.

SERMON XXIII.

*Psal. lxii. 11. God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this,—
That power belongeth unto God.*

DAVID, the royal penman of this psalm, doth from the beginning and downward, once and again, declare and profess his faith and confidence in God, and in him alone, notwithstanding of the power and malice of his enemies. And then in verse 8th he exhorts others of the Lord's people, to fix their faith and confidence on God, after his example. In order hereunto, he labours to take them off from false and ill grounded confidences, whether in person or things, verse 9th and 10th. And then in the last two verses, he lays down the true and sure grounds of faith and confidence in God, viz. The power, mercy, and righteousness of God.

So that here in my text, he lays down a sure ground of trust and confidence in God, even in times of greatest danger. We may notice in the verse these two things.

1. A preface whereby he ushers in this. *God hath spoken once: twice have I heard this.* Nothing is able to settle our confidence in God, but the powerful impression of his own word. *Twice have I heard this, That power, &c.* How did he hear this *twice*? Once from the voice of creation, and again from the voice of government. *Mercy* was heard in government after man had sinned, not in creation: But we have heard of the *power* of God *twice*: Once we heard of it in creation, and again more gloriously in the work of redemption, wherein his *power* and *mercy* were linked together. Or, *Twice have I heard this, That power, &c.* That is, it is a most certain and undoubted truth, that *power* is essential to the Divine Nature. The repetition of a thing confirms the certainty of it. *Mercy* is also essential; but *power* is more apparently so, because no act of *mercy* can be exercised without *power*. Or, though God spake this but *once*, yet David heard it *twice*, or often: That is, he thoroughly weighed and considered it at God's *once* speaking. In this sense, a gracious person hears that *twice* that God speaks but *once*. Or, *twice*, that is, frequently; because what God had *once* spoken, had been often repeated and inculcated, and often cleared and confirmed to him, by repeated experimental evidence of the certainty thereof; and he had thereupon received the same more and more heartily, and had taken deeper impressions of it by repeated and inculcated thoughts.

2. The truth asserted or laid down. It must be some special and extraordinary thing that David ushers in with such a preface, That God spoke so solemnly, and he heard so attentively. But what was it? *That power belongeth unto God.*

There is a two-fold power attributed to God in scripture.

1. A power of authority; whereby, as sovereign Lord, he hath right and authority to command all the creatures, and to dispose of them according to his own pleasure, and is not accountable to any: For he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can say to him, what dost thou (a)?

2. A power of ability; which is, strength to act. In this sense it is usually taken in scripture; and so it is to be understood here. Now, says he, *power belongeth unto God*: To him only, and to none else.

He hath matchless and incomparable power: All other power

(a) Dan. iv. 35.

power is done, comparatively to his. Power belongeth to him as his proper and peculiar excellency; as his crown and sceptre; as his prerogative. All creatures are but poor impotent things, in comparison of him.

The doctrine I shall speak to, is this,

Matchless and incomparable power is one of the divine excellencies: Or, Power is the proper and peculiar excellency of the divine nature.

The first article of the creed, commonly called the apostles', teacheth us to believe that God is Almighty. In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall shew,

1. That God is powerful; and that matchless power is one of his glorious excellencies.
2. What the power of God is; or what is the nature of this divine perfection.
3. That God is matchless and incomparable in his power; and how he is so.
4. Wherein the infinite and matchless power of God is manifested and discovered.
5. I shall apply the whole.

First, That God is powerful. Power is an excellency belonging to the divine nature. Indeed it is essential to the conception of God: We cannot conceive him God, if we do not conceive him most powerful. He is not God, if he cannot do what he will. We cannot conceive God, without a power suitable to his nature and essence: Therefore, his essence being infinite, he must also be infinite in power.

Particularly, That infinite and matchless power is one of the divine excellencies, appears, both from scripture, and from reason.

1. From scripture. It is often attributed to him in the holy scriptures, and is there set forth divers ways, viz. Affirmatively, effectively, negatively, and metaphorically. 1. Affirmatively: So, he is often called *mighty* (b), and *strong and mighty* (c). That is a notable expression which Job hath, *If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong* (d). Here is one that is strong indeed, strong to purpose: None can match him in this. He is not only strong, but *mighty in strength* (e); not only powerful, but *excellent in power* (f); not only mighty, but *most mighty* (g). Yea, he is *Almighty*. He is so called, as some observe,

(b) Deut. x. 17. Job xxxvi. 5. (c) Psal. xxiv. 8. (d) Job ix. 19. (e) Job ix. 4. and xxxvi. 5. (f) Job xxxvii. 23. (g) Psal. xlv. 3.

observe, thirty and one times in the book of Job, and seventy times in the whole scripture. He is called *the Almighty* (b), *God Almighty* (i), *the Lord Almighty* (k), and *the Lord God Almighty* (l). And we read of *the exceeding greatness of his power*, and *the working of his mighty power* (m). 2. Effectively: So, the scripture witnesseth, That *God can do every thing* (n); that he can do *what he pleaseth* (o); that he is able to do *exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think* (p); and that *all things are possible to him* (q). 3. Negatively; when the scripture denies any thing to be impossible, hard, or difficult to God: As in the angel's speech to Mary, *For with God nothing shall be impossible* (r). The question is proposed, *Is any thing too hard for the Lord* (s)? And it is answered, *There is nothing too hard for thee* (t). 4. Symbolically, or metaphorically: When the scripture ascribes to God *an hand* (u), *a right hand and arm* (x), and *a stretched-out arm* (y). So the power of God is called *the arm of his strength* (z). The reason of which expressions is, because a man's strength is exerted by his hand and arm. Sometimes the power of God is variously expressed, according to the different manifestations of it. It is expressed, sometimes by his *finger* (a); sometimes by his *hand* (b); and sometimes by his *arm* (c). He puts forth his power, sometimes, as it were, by a finger only; which denotes a lesser manifestation of his power: At another time, by his hand; which denotes fuller and clearer evidences of his power: Sometimes, by his arm, and his stretched-out arm; which denotes a fulness of his power.

2. That infinite and matchless power is one of the divine excellencies, appears from reason. And, 1. It must be so, because God is a Being infinitely perfect. Power is a perfection and excellency in the creature; the more power, the more excellency: Therefore, God being infinitely perfect and excellent, must be infinitely active and powerful. Any kind of weakness is a defect, and so cannot be imagined to be in God. 2. There is power in creatures. Beasts have power;

(b) Job xxxiv. 10. Ruth i. 20, 21. (i) Gen. xvii. 1. and xxxv. 11. (k) 2 Cor. vi. 18. (l) Rev. xv. 3. (m) Eph. i. 19. (n) Job xlii. 2. (o) Psal. cxv. 3. and cxxxv. 6. (p) Eph. iii. 20. (q) Matth. xix. 26. Mark xiv. 36. Luke xviii. 27. (r) Luke i. 37. (s) Gen. xviii. 14. (t) Jer. xxxii. 17. (u) 1 Chron. xxix. 12. (x) Psal. lxxxix. 13. (y) Jer. xxxii. 17. (z) Isa. lxii. 8.

(a) Exod. viii. 19. (b) Isa. lix. 1. (c) Psal. xcvi. 1.

power; men have more for the most part; angels *excel in strength* (d). But God is the Fountain of all this power; from him it is derived: Therefore, he hath eminently much more power in himself. If the power of all the creatures in heaven and earth were united in one, how inconceivably great would that power be? But so it is, that all that scattered power that is amongst the creatures, doth all meet in God the Fountain, and is infinitely more excellent in him than in them.

3. This appears from the creation of the world: *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead* (e). He that, by one act of his will, brought forth all the creatures out of the abyſs of nothing, certainly nothing can be too hard for him. He that *hangs the earth upon nothing*, that *stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain* (f), what can he not do? He that made this world, could make ten thousand more if he pleased. 4. I argue from providence. He that upholds and governs all the creatures; he that sets bounds to the raging sea, and holds the winds in his fist; he that hath power over the hearts and affections of men, and can dispose of them, change and turn them as he pleaseth: He that lays effectual restraints on malicious devils and men; O what a mighty power must he have! Again, such works and effects as are above the power of nature, yea, contrary to the ordinary course of nature, and above the power of any natural cause, as miracles; these are arguments of an infinite supreme power. He that can turn the course of nature according to his own pleasure, and that by a word, can any thing be too hard for him? 5. Power is such a necessary perfection of God, that his other perfections would not be valid and effectual without it. As holiness is the beauty of all God's attributes, so power is the life of them in their exercise: No acts of justice, or mercy, or wisdom, can be exercised by him without it. His justice is powerful, to punish offenders; his mercy powerful, to relieve the miserable; his truth powerful, to make good his promises. The power of God is, as a worthy divine saith *, "The arm, the hand of the Deity, which all his other attributes lay hold upon, when they would appear in their glory." So that the power of God is one of his greatest perfections. It is called *his glory*; and

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(d) Psal. cv. 20. (e) Rom. i. 20. (f) Job xxvi. 7. Isa. xl. 22.

* Charnock.

the riches of his glory: And we read of his glorious power (g). 6. To conclude, the very heathens, by the light of nature, had a sense of this divine perfection. By the Grecian philosophers, he is called *omnipotent* *. Tully says †, "There is nothing that God cannot do, and that without any labour." ‡ *Father Almighty*, and *Jupiter Almighty*, are familiar to the poets. And it was the plain doctrine of Pythagoras §, who taught his scholars to believe miracles, and to doubt of nothing said to be done by the gods, because all things were possible to them. Homer plainly asserts ||, "That God can do all things." Indeed the omniscience of God was never denied by any heathen, that did not deny the being of a God, save one, and that was Pliny, and that upon very weak grounds. And Ludovicus Vives ¶ wonders that so learned a man as Pliny should cavil at God's omnipotence.

Second, I go on to shew what the power of God is, or what is the nature of this divine perfection. It is that essential attribute of the divine nature, whereby God is conceived as able to bring to pass whatsoever he will, or is able to will. Power is an ability to bring a thing into act. It denotes the principle of action.

The power of God is usually distinguished, by divines, into his absolute and his ordinate power. His absolute power is that whereby he is able to do all things possible to be done, though he never will do the same; his ordinate power is that whereby he doth that which he hath decreed to do. These two are not distinct powers, but the same power, considered with respect to different objects, determined by the will and pleasure of God. His ordinate power is a part of his absolute power. His absolute power is the power in his nature; his ordinate power is that power exercised. His absolute power is necessary, and belongs to his nature; his ordinate power is free, and is guided by his will and wisdom. I shall speak a little of each of them.

1. God's

(g) Rom. vi. 4. Eph. iii. 16. Col. i. 11.

* *παντακρατορ*.

† *Nihil est quod Deus efficere non potest, & quidem sine ullo labore.*
Cic. de Divinat.

‡ *Pater omnipotens, & Jupiter omnipotens.*

§ *Jamb. de vita Pythag. Cap. 28.*

|| *Καλεπο'ν δ' ε' τ' ο'ρυσεν Ανδρα'σι, γ' ε' θνητοι'σι, Δι' ο' δ' ε' τε
παντα δυνάται.* Homer Odyss. K.

¶ *Comment. in Aug. de Civit. Dei L. V. C. 10.*

1. God's absolute power, or the power of his nature, is that whereby he is able to do whatsoever he is able to will, though he never will do the same. Though the scripture tells us that he hath done whatsoever he will, yet it doth not tell us that he hath done whatsoever he could. † He can do many things, that he never will do. He could have sent *legions of angels* (b) to rescue Christ out of the hands of his enemies. He could of the *stones* in the wilderness have *raised up children to Abraham* (i). He could have made millions of worlds, redeemed devils, and left the whole mass of mankind to perish, if he had pleased. His power is as great as his will. The will of creatures is more extensive than their power: But whatsoever God is able to will, falls within the compass of his power. Though he hath decreed that such and such things shall never come to pass; yet, upon supposition that he could actually will them, he is able to perform them.

God's absolute power may be considered in a twofold respect. 1. In regard of the object. 2. In regard of the manner of acting.

(1.) In regard of the object. He can do all things possible; whatsoever he himself conceives can be done, or whatsoever by power may be done. *With God all things are possible* (k). He can not only do all things possible to nature, but all things possible in nature; that is, all such things as are not contrary to his own nature and perfections, or do not imply a contradiction, or are not repugnant in their own nature to be done.

Hence we see that things simply impossible are excluded from the object of divine power. God can do things that are impossible to nature, things above and besides nature, things above the ordinary course of nature, and power of second causes; as, to make the sun to stand still, the fire not to burn, &c. He can do things *impossible with men* (l), but he cannot do things impossible in nature; which yet doth not argue any defect or want of power in him. For clearing this, consider, that things impossible in nature, are such as respect either the agent or the object. 1. The agent. And so, such things are impossible as are repugnant, either to the nature and being of God; as, to die, suffer, &c. or to his glorious perfections; as, to lie, or deny himself. That God cannot do such things, is not from any defect, but from the eminency of his power, and absolute perfection: For these things im-

ply

† *A potentia absoluta ad opus, non valet consequentia.*

(b) Matth. xxvi. 53. (i) Matth. iii. 9. (k) Mark x. 27.
(l) Matth. xix. 26.

ply weakness and not power. Hence it is said *, 1 Sam. xv. 29. *The Strength of Israel will not lie.* To die, were to cast off his immortality; to lie, were to deny his own truth. He cannot do any thing unworthy of himself, or unbecoming any of his glorious perfections. 2. The object: And so these things are impossible, that are repugnant in their own nature to be done. Such are all these things that imply a contradiction; as to make that the same thing should both be and not be, at the same instant of time. † That God cannot do such things, is not impotency, but power and perfection: For, to do them; were to act repugnantly, and overturn his own action. Such also are things impossible to be done, because of the incapability of the subject; as, to make a creature omnipotent, independent, &c. These things fall not under the compass of divine power; not from any defect of power in God, but because of a deficiency in the creature. They are not proper objects of power. Therefore, it is more proper to say concerning them, that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them: that we may not seem to charge God with any weakness; and because the reason of the impossibility of these things, is in the nature of the things themselves. They cannot be brought into being, and so cannot be the works of power. He can do all things, which being done, argue power or perfection.

But God's absolute power may be considered,

(2.) In regard of the manner of acting. God can do whatsoever he is able to will. 1. Most easily. He can do all things without any difficulty. Yea, all things possible are alike easy to him. *He fainteth not, neither is weary. It is nothing to him to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power (m).* 2. Irresistibly. He cannot be resisted. His power cannot be checked, restrained, or frustrated. *None can stay his hand. None can resist his will (n):* And therefore none can resist his power. This will be the more evident, when we consider, that

* *Nec potestas ejus minuitur, cum dicitur mori falliq; non posse. Sic enim hoc non potest, ut potius, si possit, minoris esset utique potestatis.* Aug. de Civ Dei. L. V. C. 10.

Quid ergo ei impossibile? Illud utiq; quod natura ejus contrarium est, non quod virtute arduum. Ambr. Annot. in Numb.

† *Quaquam immensa est Dei potentia, dici tamen quædam possunt ad quæ se illa non extendit, quia quæ ita dicuntur, dicuntur tantum, sensum autem qui rem exprimat nullum habent, sed sibi ipsis repugnant.* Grot. de Jur. Bell. et Pac. L. I. C. 1. § 10.

(m) Isa. xl. 28. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. (n) Dan. iv. 35. Rom. ix. 19.

that his power, though it be distinct from his will, according to our manner of conceiving, yet it is not really distinct therefrom. His will is the principle of action; his works stand forth as he wills them: and his will works without labour. *God said, Let there be light, and there was light, &c. He commanded, and they were created (o).* It is sufficient to the existence of a thing, that God wills it to exist. He can act what he will, only by his will, without any instruments.

2. God's ordinate power, is that whereby he doth what he hath decreed to do, or what he wills and is pleased to do. It is called ordinate, because it is a power he hath ordained or appointed to be exercised; or, because it is exercised about things ordained by him. It is called also, by some divines, his actual power, because it is his power actuated and put forth. Of this power we read in these texts, *Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever he pleased: And, Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all the deep places (p).* The objects of this power, are all things decreed or ordained by God; all things that he wills to bring to pass. This ordinate power of God is the exercise of his absolute power. It is the power in his nature exercised and put forth. It is of a distinct conception from his will, though they are not really distinct. In our conception, determination belongs to his will; execution, to his power. His ordinate power is the application of his will to effect what it hath resolved. His power effects what his will orders. So the psalmist tells us, *He hath done whatsoever he pleased: And, says the apostle, He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (q).* It is the constant efficacy or execution of his omnipotent and eternal will.

God's ordinate power is the power of his nature, bounded by his will, and regulated by the other perfections of his nature. 1. It is his power bounded by his will. Though God can do whatsoever he pleaseth; yet he is not pleased to do whatsoever he can. He hath a power in his nature to do what he never will do. By his absolute power, he could have prevented man's fall, or destroyed the world immediately after man's sin: But in regard of his eternal will and decree, he could not morally do any of them. The exercise of his power is subordinate to his decree and will, which hath put a bar and set bounds to it, so that he cannot morally

(o) Gen. i. 3. Psal. cxlviii. 5. (p) Psal. cxv. 3. Psal. cxlrv. 6.
(q) Psal. cxv. 3. Eph. i. 11.

ly put forth his power, beyond what he hath willed and decreed from eternity. 2. His ordinate power is his power regulated by the other perfections of his nature. As, (1.) By his wisdom. No wise man will put forth his power to the utmost, but only so far as is necessary for accomplishing his design and purpose. So, God in all that he doth, acts most wisely. His power is conducted by wisdom for bringing about his own ends and purposes. He is a *God of judgment* (r). He acts judiciously and rationally. This is seen both in creation and providence. Though his absolute power could have made every creature better, and with greater degrees of perfection; yet his ordinate power, being regulated by his wisdom, framed all things best for the ends to which he designed them. And though his absolute power could always bring about his ends in miraculous ways; yet the exercise of his power is usually confined by his wisdom and will to ordinary means. (2.) By his justice and righteousness. *His right hand is full of righteousness* (s). His power is a just power. Because of his righteousness, he can never use it ill. His might never exceeds right. (3.) By his goodness and mercy. It is a power in the hand of a good and merciful God. God could plague all the wicked in the world continually, and cut them off from all the blessings even of his common providence: But his power is regulated and guided by his mercy and goodness. He is good and doth good, even to the worst of men, and the earth is full of his mercy. So, in his dealings with his own, his power is in the hand of a gracious and tender-hearted Father.

S E R M O N XXIV.

Third, **I** Proceed to shew, that God is matchless and incomparable in his power. This is in a great measure evident from what hath been said; but I shall endeavour to clear it yet a little further. Power belongeth unto God: To him only, and to none else. There is nothing deserves the name of power, but what is proper and peculiar to God. The power of all creatures is none in comparison. Hence it is said in the conclusion of that excellent and perfect pattern of all prayer, called the Lord's Prayer, *Thine is the power* (a). There is nothing worthy to be called power, but his own. Hence we read of *the might of his power* *. All power,

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(r) Isa. xxx. 18. (s) Psal. xlviii. 10. (a) Eph. i. 19.

* τοῦ κρατος τῆς ἰσχυος.

compared to his, hath no might in it; it is but very weakness. In his power he hath no equal. Hence the psalmist cries out, *Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee (b)?* Men are strong; but *the weakness of God is stronger than men (c)*; that is, in these actions wherein God is pleased to conceal his power, and seems to act weakly; even in these he excels all human power. Hence it is, that God challengeth Job, *Hast thou an arm like God (d)?*

Particularly, That God is matchless and incomparable in his power, will appear from these properties and excellencies of the power of God.

1. His power is essential. As it is essentially in God, and inseparable from his nature; so it is not really distinct from his essence. It is his essence considered as operative; or the inconceivable activity of his essence. Whatever God doth, he doth it by his own essence. Though the action be terminated in the creature; yet the power of acting is the same with the essence of God. And it must needs be so, because of the simplicity of his being. Hence it appears, that omnipotence is incommunicable to any creature: No creature can share with God in it. It is a peculiar right of the Godhead. Being the same with the essence of God, it can no more be communicated than the essence itself.

2. It is independent power. God hath it in and of himself. It is not derived from any thing without him, as the power of all creatures is. It is also independent in the exercise thereof. The power of God needs no matter to work upon; he can create things of nothing. It needs no time to work in; for he can make time, and begin his work when he pleaseth. It needs no copy to work by; himself is his own pattern. It needs no instruments or means to work with: For, though he ordinarily use means and instruments; yet it is not because he needs their power, but out of his abundant goodness, deriving power to them. What he acts by them, he could act himself without them. He works, sometimes without means, sometimes by small means, sometimes by contrary means; to shew that he is not tied to any. He can perfect his works without dependence on any thing.

3. It

(b) Psal. lxxxix. 6, 8. (c) 1 Cor. i. 25. (d) Job xl. 9.

* *Non ergo quispiam audebit quamlibet creaturam, siue celestem siue terrestrem, dicere omnipotentem.*

Author Lib. de Symb. ad Catechum, Lib. II. Cap. 3.

3. It is infinite power. Hence we read of *the exceeding greatness of his power* (e). The greatness of his power exceeds all bounds and limits: It hath no end. *He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think* (f). His power is not only infinite with respect to us, because it is above the power of any creature, and because we cannot in our understanding reach the bounds of it: But it is also infinite in itself, and absolutely so. It is an unlimited power: No bounds can be set to it. His essence is infinite and unlimited; therefore his power, which is the same with his essence, must be so also. Particularly, the power of God is infinite, both extensively and intensively. 1. It is extensively infinite, in regard of the multitude of objects he can bring into being. *He can do every thing* (g). It is true, he cannot make a thing infinite in being, because of the incapability of the subject; to be a creature and to be infinite, is a contradiction: Yet the objects of divine power are innumerable. He can produce such effects as pass the arithmetic of all creatures, and such as never had any being, and such as the mind of man cannot conceive. He can do infinitely more than he hath done, or ever will do. There is no conceiving the numberless possible effects of his power. 2. It is intensively infinite. And that, (1.) In regard of the manner of operation. He is able to produce things in an infinite manner, of nothing. A creating power must needs be an infinite power, a power beyond that of all creatures: For that axiom in philosophy, *Of nothing nothing is made* *, holds true of all created power. Nothing can be created by a finite power. But God can create numberless things: He can bring forth things from nothing, and that by a word most easily †. Nothing is *too hard for him*. He can never meet with any difficulty. (2) In regard of the endowments he can bestow on his creatures. He could have given higher degrees of perfection to every thing that he hath made in this world. He can produce a world far more perfect and excellent than this is.

4. It is an eternal. Hence we read of his *eternal power and Godhead* (h). His power is not limited by time. As it never began to be, so it can never cease to be: *In the Lord*

JEHOVAH

(e) Eph. i. 19. (f) Eph. iii. 20. (g) Job xlii. 2. (h) Rom. i. 20.

* *Ex nihilo nihil fit.*

† *Quomodo ab homine divina illa vis differret, si, ut homo, sic etiam Deus ope indigeat aliena: Indiget autem, si nihil moliri potest, nisi ab altero illi materia ministretur.* Lactant. L. II. C. 9.

JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (i). It can suffer no diminution to eternity. When men have been at work, they must have some time to recruit their tired spirits: But none of God's works can enfeeble or dull his power; it cannot languish: *The Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary (k)*. Men rust with age, and their strength is dried up: But the power of the *Ancient of Days* is never spent nor wasted. No weakness can seize on him: *His arm is not shortened, that it cannot save*. God takes up Moses short, when he asks, *Is the Lord's hand waxed short (l)?*

5. It is irresistible and insuperable power. *None can stay his hand (m)*. He works through all opposition: *I will work, says he, and who shall let it (n)?* No opposite power can be a hindrance to God. All rubs in his way are as plain ground before him. *Who would set the briars and thorns against him in battle? He would go through them, he would burn them together (o)*. The united strength of all creatures cannot stand before him. *Behold he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, what dost thou (p)?* He can take away the thrones of princes, the candlesticks of churches, the peace and wealth of nations, and none can hinder him. And if he will make use of those to fulfil his counsels, who neither know them nor mind them; who can put a bar in his way? Hence is that promise of deliverance by Cyrus, Isa. xlv. 10, 11. *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it*. His power is above all checks and controls *

6. It is original power; the fountain of all power. The power of all creatures is derived from him. The Lord poseth Job with a question, *Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder (q)?* And the like question might be proposed with respect to the power of all other creatures. *In his hand it is to give strength unto all (r)*. Hence

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(i) Isa. xxvi. 4. (k) Isa. xl. 28. (l) Isa. lix. 1. Numb. xi. 23. (m) Dan. iv. 35. (n) Isa. xliii. 13. (o) Isa. xxvii. 4. (p) Job ix. 12.

* *Neque enim veraciter ob aliud vocatur omnipotens, nisi quia quicquid vult potest; nec voluntate cujuspiam creature voluntatis omnipotentis impeditur effectus.* Aug. Enchirid. Cap. 96.

(q) Job xxxix. 19. (r) 1 Chron. xxix. 12.

our blessed Lord saith unto Pilate, *Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above (s)*. The power of all things that ever were or shall be, is originally in God: All created power is but a drop from this Fountain. God is *El Elobim, The Mighty of mighties (t)*, whence all mighty persons have their activity and power. He is the Lord of hosts, the Creator and Conductor of the heavenly militia.

7. It is incomprehensible power. No creature can conceive the extent of it. It extends infinitely beyond the measure of all finite understandings. *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: He is excellent in power (u)*. He hath a power of acting, above our power of understanding. He hath a fulness of power, an exceeding strength, above all created capacities. The understandings of men and angels centred in one creature, would fall short of the conception of it. *How little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of his power who can understand (x)?* God himself only comprehends it. All that we have heard of his power, is nothing to what may be declared; and what may be declared, is nothing to what may be conceived; and what may be conceived, is nothing to what is above the conceptions of men and angels.

Fourth, I come, in the next place, to shew wherein God's matchless and incomparable power is manifest; or wherein it appears.

1. It appears in the work of creation. *His eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (y)*. Hence the prophet gives him the glory of his creating power; *Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power, and stretched-out arm (z)*. The heavens and the earth are the two great standing mountains of his power. But the heaven especially, is a most magnificent piece of work, wherein his power is most conspicuous. Hence it is called *the firmament of his power (a)*. Particularly, the power of God is manifest, 1. In making all things of nothing, having no pre-existent matter for him to work upon. *He called these things which be not, as though they were (b)*. He called them out of the abyss of nothing. 2. In making all things without any assistance, and without any instruments to work by: *For he stretched forth the heavens alone, and spread abroad the*

(s) John xix. 11. (t) Dan. xi. 36. (u) Job xxxvii. 27.
 (x) Job xxvi. 14. (y) Rom. i. 20. (z) Jer. xxxiih 17.
 (a) Psal. cl. 1. (b) Rom. iv. 17.

the earth by himself (c). As he had no need of any assistance or instruments: So, the work of creation, being a work of infinite power, none could co-operate with him in it, nor contribute any thing thereunto. 3. In making all things by his word, one simple act of his will: *For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast: And, he commanded, and they were created (d).* All was done by a powerful order of his own will. He created all things without any labour or pain, with more ease than we can speak a word.

2. It appears in the preservation of the world, and all things therein. He is the *Preserver of man and beast (e).* By the same power by which he gave the creatures a being, he continues them in their being. *He upholdeth all things by the word of his power (f).* What an almighty grasp must he have that upholds *all things*? All the creatures would sink into nothing, were they not upheld in their being by the mighty power of God: So that preservation is a continued creation from moment to moment: For, *In him we live, and move, and have our being (g).* The whole civth psalm is a description of God's preserving power. *He hangeth the earth upon nothing (h).* It hangs like a ball in the midst of the heavens. He bridles the sea, that it may not overflow the earth. *He hath placed the sand for the bounds of the sea, by a perpetual decree that it cannot pass it (i).* He hath set bars and doors, and said, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed (k).* What a mighty power must that be, that sustains so many creatures, sets bounds to the raging sea, holds the winds in his fist, and preserves a comely and beautiful order, and a sweet harmony and agreement, between such creatures as are of different and disagreeing natures?

3. It appears in the government of the world. I shall give instance in a few things, in his moral and gracious government. As,

(1.) In governing and ordering the hearts of men. He grasps the hearts of all men in his omnipotent hand; yea, even of the greatest men, of kings and princes. *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever he will (l).* He can make men concur to the accomplishment of his purposes, contrary to their own intentions. Solomon tells us, *When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him (m).* How did

(c) Isa. xlii. 24. (d) Psal. xxxiii. 9. Psal. cxlviii. 5. (e) Psal. xxxvi. 6. (f) Heb. i. 3. (g) Acts xvii. 28. (h) Job xxvi. 7. (i) Jer. v. 22. (k) Job xxxviii. 10, 11. (l) Prov. xxi. 1. (m) Prov. xvi. 7.

did he manage the hearts of Esau and Balaam! God hath the key of hearts in his hand. He bent the hearts of the Egyptians, so that they sent away *the children of Israel* with great riches, by lending them jewels of silver and gold. By a secret instinct he turned Jehoshaphat's enemies away from him. And at another time, he turned his enemies against one another, so that they sheathed their swords in one another's bowels (n). He can take off the spirits of men in the very act of their rage, as he did the wheels from the Egyptian chariots.

(2.) In governing the most stubborn creatures. As, 1. In governing devils. They have great power, and are full of malice: But in spite of all their might and malice, God governs them, as a man doth prisoners in fetters. He hath them chained. He governs all their motions. The devil could not touch Job, nor any thing he had, nor could the devils enter into the Gadarenes' swine, without leave (o). Considering their power and malice, there would be no safety or security for us, if they were not curbed and restrained by a superior power. 2. In governing wicked men. The tumults of people, as well as the waves of the sea, are of an impetuous nature, and quelled by the same power. *He stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people* (p). If the brutish passions in the hearts of men, were let loose by that infinite Power that bridles them, how soon would the world run into confusion, and be drenched with blood? The king of Assyria triumphed in his design against Jerusalem: But how did God govern this wild ass? *I will put my hook in thy nose, says he, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest* (q).

(3.) In raising up a church to himself in spite of all spiritual and secular enemies; especially the New Testament church. The church was raised, and the gospel planted, not by human force and power, but by his own divine power. The doctrine of the gospel was contrary to corrupt nature, to the rooted customs and prejudices of Jews and Gentiles, and to the corrupt reason of wise philosophers; the instruments that published and preached it, were outwardly contemptible, a few poor fishermen, destitute of all worldly advantages, and not backed with the power and countenance of earthly

(n) Exod. xi. 2, 3. 2 Chron. xviii. 31. 2 Chron. xx. (o) Jude verse 6. Job i. 12. Matth. viii. 34. (p) Psal. lxxv. 7.
(q) Isa. xxvii. 29.

earthly princes and potentates: Yet this doctrine prevailed, and the gospel had wonderful success through all parts of the known world, and that against the power and policy of men and devils. How could this be, without a mighty operation of the power of God on the hearts of men? Hence the gospel is called *The power of God* (r).

(4.) In preserving, defending, and supporting his church under the most terrible waves and tempests. This is promised by our Saviour, *And upon this Rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (s). The most flourishing monarchies have withered, and the strongest kingdoms have been broken in pieces: Yet the church hath been preserved and supported, notwithstanding of many and mighty adversaries, who in all ages have pushed at her, like so many bulls of Bashan. Yea, God hath preserved and delivered his church in the greatest extremities; as in Egypt, when the tale of the brick were doubled; at the Red Sea, when the knife was at the throat of God's Israel; and in Queen Esther's days, when a bloody decree was made for slaying all the Jews. Yea, God hath delivered his church by weak instruments, such as Moses, a fugitive from Egypt; and Aaron, a poor captive in it; and by unlikely means, armies of lice and locusts. In all ages, God hath displayed his power in the preservation of his church, notwithstanding of the power, rage, and malice of her enemies, who endeavoured to extirpate her out of the world; so that she hath been as *the bush burning, and yet not consumed*. God is *the strength of Israel* (t); and hath protected his little flock in the midst of wolves. And what he hath done, he can do again; so that in the greatest extremities his people have ground to trust in him.

(5.) In the conversion of his elect. Hence, the gospel, which is the mean and instrument of conversion, is called *the Power of God, and the Rod of his strength* (u). And the day of the success of the gospel in bringing in sinners to Christ, is called *The day of his power* (x). O what a mighty power must that be, that quells the stoutness and stubbornness of the heart, demolisheth the strong holds of sin in the soul, routs all the armies of corrupt nature, and makes the stubborn heart strike sail to Jesus Christ! In this work *the arm of the Lord is revealed*. A mighty power is exerted in working faith in the heart

(r) Rom. i. 16. 1 Cor. i. 18. (s) Matth. xvi. 18. (t) 1 Sam. xv. 29. (u) Rom. i. 16. Psal. cx. 2. (x) Psal. cx. 3.

heart of a sinner (y): And this work is carried on with such sweetness, that never any complained of grace's way. There is in it, as one of our worthy divines †saith, *a sweet omnipotency, and an omnipotent suavity.*

(6.) In preserving the souls of believers amidst the many dangers to which they are exposed, and conducting them safe to glory. They have many enemies without; a powerful and subtle devil, and an ensnaring world; and they have strong corruptions within, and but weak graces: So that it may be justly matter of wonder, how they are preserved. But they *are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation* (z). Corruption in them would soon extinguish grace in their hearts, if not kept by a divine power. It is *Christ's hand*, and the *Father's hand*, that keeps his sheep (a). It is his power that moderates the violence of temptations, sustains his people under them, defeats the power of Satan, and bruises him under their feet. It is by his power that *the work of faith is fulfilled*; and it is his power that *strengthens* them under trials and temptations (b).

4. It appears in our redemption by Christ. Hence Christ is called *The power of God* (c). Here the arm of divine power was lifted up on high. Particularly, the power of God was manifested, 1. In the conception of Christ in the womb of a virgin. *The power of the Highest did overshadow her* (d). The manner of his conception was supernatural. Hence he is called the *Stone cut out without hands* (e). 2. In uniting the two natures, the divine and human, infinitely distant, in one person; and that without any confusion of the two natures, or changing the one into the other. O what a wonder of power was here, that two natures, a divine and a human, in themselves infinitely distant, should meet in a personal conjunction! That is an admirable expression, *The Word was made flesh* (f). 3. In supporting the human nature of Christ under that terrible weight of divine wrath that came upon him for our sins, and making him victorious over the devil. His human nature could not possibly have borne up under the wrath of God, and the curse of the law, nor held out under such contests with the power of darkness, if it had not been upheld by an infinite power. Hence the Father says concerning Christ, *Behold my Servant whom I uphold* (g). 4. In raising Christ from the

(y) Isa. liii. 1. Eph. i. 19. † Durham on Isaiah liii. (z) 1 Pet. i. 5.
 (a) John x. 28, 29. (b) 2 Thess. i. 11. Col. i. 11. Eph. iii. 16.
 (c) 1 Cor. i. 24. (d) Luke i. 35. (e) Dan. ii. 34. (f) John
 i. 14. (g) Isa. xlii. 1.

the dead. The apostle tells us that God exerted *his mighty power in Christ, when he raised him from the dead (h)*. That he should be raised up from under the curse of the law, and the infinite weight of our sins, and brought forth with success and glory, after his encounter with the powers of hell: In this the power of God was gloriously manifested. Hence he is said to be *raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father (i)*: That is, by his glorious power.

S E R M O N XXV.

Fifthly, FOLLOWS the application of this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction. In several particulars.

Instr. 1. We may be hence confirmed in our belief of the resurrection. *Why*, says the apostle, *should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead (u)*? Indeed, it cannot be thought so, if we believe and ponder the infinite power of God. This makes the belief of it easy. Therefore, when the apostle is speaking of *Christ's changing the vile bodies of believers at the resurrection*, he leads us to the consideration of his divine power, *whereby*, says he, *he is able even to subdue all things unto himself (b)*. When we consider that nothing is impossible unto God, this makes all our doubts about the resurrection to vanish. Hence our Lord tells the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God (c)*. The power of God shews that it may be, and the scriptures shew that it shall be; the one shews what God can do, and the other what he will do. God is infinite in power, to gather the dust of our bodies together, and to unite the dust of each body, and that in the twinkling of an eye. Did he, by one powerful act of his will, raise the world out of the abyss of nothing? And shall it be thought too hard for him, to gather together and unite the scattered parts of our bodies? Our firm belief of the former, may well render the belief of the latter the more easy.

Instr. 2. Here also we have a ground of the immutability of God's decrees and purposes. No bars or impediments in his way, can force him to any change, because of his infinite power. He challengeth this as his prerogative: *And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me (d)*? Men are often forced to change their purposes, for want of

power

(h) Eph. i. 19, 20.

(i) Rom. vi. 4.

(a) Acts. xxvi. 8,

(b) Phil. iii. 21.

(c) Matth. xxii. 29.

(d) Isa. xlv. 7.

power to execute them : But what can be a bar in his way, who, if he please, can dash the whole creation in pieces in a moment of time ?

Instr. 3. Is God infinite in power ? Then difficulties that lie in the way of the accomplishment of his promises should be no stumbling-block to our faith ; because his mighty power can surmount all difficulties in his way. Hence it is said of Abraham, *he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God : and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform* (e). Abraham was sensible of the difficulties in the way, both before he had a son, and after, when he was commanded to offer him up : But he trusted and rested on the power of God for the accomplishment of his promise †. Difficulty or unlikelihood should never discourage or weaken our faith, because of the infinite power of God.

Instr. 4. It follows, from this doctrine, that presumptuous sinning, and obstinacy in sin, is no better than madness. Presumptuous and Heaven-daring sinners, who sin with a high hand, must be possessed with a prodigious madness. Why ? Because they run upon a God of infinite power, and enter the lists with Omnipotency, and will have their way in spite of the Almighty, let him do his worst. So they are described by Eliphaz : *He stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. He runneth upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers* (f). Every sinner runs from God ; but the presumptuous sinner is so desperately mad, that he runneth upon God, and fights against him, and bids defiance to him, till at last he fall upon the sharp spikes of his bucklers. Obstinate sinners also are no less mad ; for they enter upon a plain contest with the mighty God, and strive and fight against him *. When God strives with you to reclaim you, by the calls, counsels, and threatenings of his word, by manifold mercies, and by lesser rods and judgments : If you still stand out, and will still go on in your sins ; then it comes to a plain contest between God and you, who shall have the better. God, as it were, says to you, let your sins go, your lying, cursing, Sabbath-breaking, abominable uncleanness

(e) Rom. iv. 20, 21.

† *Nulla est in promissis Dei falsitas, quia nulla est in faciendis difficultas aut impossibilitas.* Fulgent. Lib. I. ad Maxim.

(f) Job xv. 25, 26.

* *Homo malus atque in malis obstinatus pene demonem aequat.* Petrarch. de injusto Domino.

cleanness and drunkenness, and other iniquities; let all these go: This is God's message to you; this is his voice in his word and providences. Now, if you obstinately stand out, and will not part with your sins, whatever God do or say in the contrary; then you strive and contend against the great and mighty God: And, O it is dreadful to set yourselves as parties against him; for, *He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered (g)?* The proudest sinner among you is no match for God; therefore obstinate contending with God will surely be your ruin.

Use 2. For reproof. To several sorts of persons.

Repr. 1. To them that doubt of or question the mighty power of God. If we search our own hearts to the bottom, we will find that it is the power of God we often doubt of, rather than his will; and seeming doubts of his will are but pretences to cover our shameful doubts of his power. A plain evidence of this is, that doubts do not haunt us but in cases of danger and difficulty. Further, it is certain that God knows our hearts much better than we do ourselves: Now, in the holy scriptures he still represents men as doubting of his power. Sarah doubted of God's power to perform his promise, as is plainly implied in what the Lord saith to Abraham, *Wherefore did Sarah laugh?—Is any thing too hard for the Lord (h)?* Moses also doubted of God's power to give the people flesh to eat, when he says to the Lord, *Thou hast said I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them? And to this the Lord answers, Is the Lord's hand waxed short (i)?* So that even Moses was overtaken with this kind of unbelief, after all the experiments he had of God's miraculous acts: God's answer to him plainly shews that this was at the bottom. The children of Israel, in the wilderness, did also disbelieve the power of God; *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? say they; Can he give bread? Can he provide flesh for his people (k)?* And when Christ came to raise Lazarus from the dead, Martha says, *Lord, by this time he stinketh (l):* As if it passed the power of God to raise him up. From all which we see that even believers in Christ are apt to question the power of God in hard and difficult cases. But whence doth this arise? 1. From the imperfection of our understanding.

VOL. I. N^o. 2.

E c

As

(g) Job ix. 4. (h) Gen. xviii. 13, 14. (i) Numb. xi. 21, 22, 23. (k) Psal. lxxviii. 19, 20. (l) John xi. 39.

As a young child doth not know his father's strength; so, our capacities are so shallow that we have but mean conceptions of what the power of God can do for us. 2. From the deep and strong sense we have of present danger and difficulty, which shuts out the actual thoughts of the divine power. The present temptation will not allow the soul liberty to think of it. 3. Because we are inured to principles of sense, and converse so much with limited beings, therefore we are apt to measure God's way of working by the ordinary working of second causes; as it is said of God's ancient people, *They limited the holy One of Israel (m)*.

But let it be considered that it is a great sin to question the power of God. It is to deny or question his Deity, and to pull him out of his throne. Therefore God takes it ill when men limit his power. He complains of this in the children of Israel, and for this he takes up Moses short (n). It is most dishonourable and displeasing to God, and deprives people of the favours he designed for them, as we see in the children of Israel, when they questioned his power; *The Lord beard it and was wroth; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel (o)*. And when in a time of great scarcity, the prophet foretold a sudden plenty in Samaria, a certain lord answered, and said, *Behold if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be (p)*: For this a sad doom was passed upon him by the prophet; and accordingly he lived to see his unbelief confuted, and then was troden to death.

Repr. 2. To them that deny the almighty power of God. And, (1.) Some deny it doctrinally: As the Socinians, who deny the power of God to be infinite in itself, and say it is so only in respect of us, because it exceeds the power of all creatures, and because we cannot conceive the greatness of it. They hold it to be a limited power, though they say we cannot reach the bounds and limits of it by our understanding. Again, the Pelagians, Socinians, and Jesuits, hold that God wills to do many things, which by his power he doth not, being resisted by mens' free-will. This is upon the matter to hold, that the free-will of man sets bounds and limits to the power of God, which is horridly blasphemous. (2). Others deny it practically. Men may be sound and orthodox in their opinions about the power of God, who yet deny it in their practice.

(m) Psal. lxxviii. 41. (n) Psal. lxxviii. 41. Numb. xi. 23.
(o) Psal. lxxviii. 21. (p) 2 Kings vii. 2.

practice. Take a few instances of this. The power of God is practically denied. 1. By a distrust of God in straits and difficulties. When in the face of danger, we dare not trust God in the way of our duty; this implies an unworthy conceit of some weakness in him, as if he were not able to protect us from the wrath of man, but had made creatures too strong for himself. So, when the evil spies magnified the strength of the Canaanites, the children of Israel did distrust God, as if he had not been able to bring them into Canaan (q). Again, to distrust God, when there are no visible means, is a reproaching his power, as if he were bounded and limited. Hence it is said, *They limited the holy One of Israel* (r). And how they did that we are told in verses 19th and 20th; they said, *Can he furnish a table in the wilderness?* As if he were tied to means and instruments, and were like common artificers, who cannot work without their tools. 2. By a sinful fear of man. When the fear of man proves a snare, either to draw us to sin, or to deter us from duty; this is to magnify the power of the creature above the power of the Creator, as if man had more power to hurt than God hath to help. Therefore God speaks to such with so much disdain, *Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of man that shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass? And forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth* (s)? 3. By trusting in creatures. When, in our distresses, we neglect God, and run to creatures for help and relief: This implies a conceit that the creature is more powerful than God. Hence, God upbraids them that sought to Egypt for help; *Now, the Egyptians are men and not God* (t). He that trusts to any thing else besides God, denies God to have a strength sufficient for him. So much is implied in that of the psalmist, *Lo this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness* (u). 4. By ascribing the mercies we receive to the power of instruments, and not to the power of God, and making more thankful acknowledgments to them than to him. This is to deny and overlook the power of God, as if the power of the instrument were more to be regarded than the power of him that wrought by it. Thus the Assyrian ascribed his success to the strength of his own hand, which the Lord rebukes as most absurd and unreasonable:

Shall

(q) Numh. xiv. 1, 2, 3. (r) Psal. lxxviii. 41. (s) Isa. li. 12, 13. (t) Isa. xxi. 3. (u) Psal. lii. 7:

Shall the ox boast itself against him that beweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it (x)? It is God who by his power manageth instruments as he pleaseth, and from him they have all their power to act. Therefore to ascribe to the instrument the glory of the work, is a plain denial of the power of God. 5. By security in sinning. When men dream of peace and ease in a way of sin, notwithstanding of all God's terrible threatenings against it, and sleep securely in sin, under many alarming tokens of the wrath and displeasure of God; this is to charge God with weakness, and want of power to avenge the wrongs done to him; as if he were like senseless idols. 6. By unbelief. As, first, By not believing the gospel. The doctrine of the gospel hath been attended with many remarkable discoveries of the power of God; particularly, in the conversion of the nations, and in humbling the power of princes and the wisdom of philosophers: Yea, such marks of divine power are not to be seen in the work of creation, as have attended the doctrine of the gospel. Therefore the rejecting the gospel, the not embracing this doctrine, is a disgrace to all this power. Second, By not believing in Christ offered in the gospel, not receiving and closing with him by faith. Though doubts of Christ's willingness to save are often pretended for unbelief, yet most frequently it is bottomed on a secret unworthy conceit of his inability to save, and so strips him of his divine power. As faith in Christ gives him the glory of his power, so unbelief vilifies it. It is upon a diffidence of Christ's power that convinced sinners are so averse to commit their souls to his keeping: It implies a secret sentiment, that their souls are safer in their own hands, than in his.

Repr. 3. To them that condemn the power of God. This is done especially, 1. By obstinacy in sin. When after various reclaiming means, men will go on stubbornly in their transgressions, and will run the hazard of all these terrible judgments God hath threatened in his word, as if they could make good their part against him; this is an horrible contempt of his power, as is implied in that expression, *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he (y)?* Obstnacy in sin, after manifold warnings, and various tokens and testimonies of God's displeasure, implies a secret imagination that you are *stronger than he*, and that you are able to grapple with the Almighty. 2. By scoffing at divine warnings and threatenings. There is a generation of men, who either really

(x) Isa. x. 13, 14, 15.

(y) 1 Cor. x. 22.

ly or in pretence, are bold, fearless, and stout-hearted, and do not only disregard divine warnings, but entertain them with scorn and contempt, as if they would provoke God to do his utmost, and dare him to do all that he seems to threaten. For thus they speak, *Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the holy One of Israel draw near, that we may know it* (x). Such a contempt of the Almighty hath been an usual fore-runner of heavy judgments.

Repr. 4. To them that abuse the power of God. This is done, 1. When it is pleaded in defence of contradictions. The papists plead the power of God, when they are urged with the many absurdities and contradictions implied in their doctrine of transubstantiation *. This is a horrid abuse of the divine power. 2. When men presume upon this power, without using appointed means. Though God be infinite in power, yet he ordinarily exerciseth it, by blessing ordinary means, and succeeding lawful endeavours: Therefore if, in times of danger, we neglect the means that his goodness affords us for our safety; this is not to trust in his power, but to neglect it. Christ himself did not presume upon the power of God, to secure him from the Jews, but used ordinary means for his preservation, till his hour was come.

Use 3. For terror to impenitent sinners, such of you as go on in sin, and live in rebellion against God. It may be justly matter of terror to you, to think that you have to do with a God of infinite power. Particularly,

1. Though he be a God of infinite power, yet his power is not for you. The doctrine of God's omnipotency is loaded with comfort: But it is all for God's own children; you that are impenitent have no part in it. Though God be almighty to pardon, yet he will not use such a power for thee an impenitent sinner. Though he be able to save and help in the deepest distresses, yet it is presumptuous boldness in thee to expect that he will use his power to save or help thee. In your straits, difficulties, dangers, miseries, the power of God is no relief to you. Though you cry to him, yet he may return such an answer as that, *Go, and cry unto the gods whom ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation* (a). When miseries and distresses come upon you, there is none to help you. You are like a ship in a storm without a pilot, ready to be dashed against the rocks.

2. It

(2) Isa. v. 19.

* *Asylum hæreticorum est omnipotentia Dei.* Chrysost.

(a) Judges x. 14.

2. It is yet more terrible, that the power of God is against you, and will avenge the many wrongs you have done to his mercy. The consideration of his power may render the thoughts of his being an enemy very terrible. Better to have all the world against thee, than to have a God of infinite power against thee. Consider, 1. You cannot escape his hand: *For he is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered (b)?* He hath threatened terrible wrath against you for sin: And he is able to inflict it; *for he is strong that executeth his word (c).* If he make the earth open by an earthquake, and swallow up the inhabitants; if he corrupt the air, to breed pestilence; if he send unseasonable storms and showers, to corrupt the fruits of the ground, *who can stay his hand?* You may break his laws, but cannot resist his power in executing deserved punishment. Can any stout-hearted sinner among you, make good your part against the Almighty God? *Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that God shall deal with thee (d)?* What are your weak hands to the grasps of his omnipotency? Who can help you against the mighty God? For if he will not withdraw his anger, *the proud helpers do stoop under him (e).* His strength is uncontrollable: *There is none that can deliver out of his hand (f).*

2. You cannot bear the weight of his wrath. The power of God renders his wrath very terrible. Hence the psalmist cries out, *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath (g).* In hell, the glory of God's power will be displayed, in the everlasting destruction of impenitent sinners: *They shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (h).* In hell, his wrath and power will be joined together, as is implied in that of the apostle, *What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (i).* God will make damned sinners sensible of his almightiness in every stroke. He will shew the strength of his arm in punishing. O how great must that vengeance be, that shall be backed with all the strength of the Almighty?

O that impenitent sinners would think of these things. What prodigious stupidity must possess the minds of such as sleep securely in sin, without horror and amazement, though they

(b) Job ix. 4. (c) Joel ii. 11. (d) Ezek. xxii. 14. (e) Job ix. 13. (f) Job x. 7. (g) Psal. xc. 11. (h) 2 Thess. i. 9. (i) Rom. ix. 22.

they hear that he is Almighty who hath threatened to take vengeance on them ! O it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (k), the Almighty God : How fearful, no tongue can express, no not theirs who feel the weight of them. Therefore, consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Set not the briars and thorns against him in battle, lest he go through them, and burn them together : But take hold of his strength, that ye may make peace with him, and ye shall make peace with him (l). It is neither wisdom nor valour to refuse terms of mercy at his hand, whose almighty power will soon bring you into the hands of justice, if offers of mercy be rejected.

S E R M O N XXVI.

Use 4. **F**OR exhortation, in several branches.

Exhort. 1. Believe the mighty power of God. Consider, 1. It is difficult to believe his power. But how can that be ? Is not this a piece of natural divinity, that God is almighty ? What need is there then to press people to believe it ? Great need, because this is the great thing we are apt to question in cases of difficulty, as I have already shewed. Else why do we pray with cheerfulness, when we see great probability of a thing ; but faint in prayer, when it otherwise ? And why do we cry out in sad times, *Oh, we shall never see good days again ?* 2. The firm belief of God's power is of great concern and moment in religion. Faith is never quite laid by, till the soul question the power of God. Oh, he cannot pardon ; he cannot save ! When it cometh to this, the soul is no longer able to hold out. So that the life and vigour of faith is very much concerned in the belief of God's power. It is indeed one of the first steps to all religion. Therefore it is put in the front of our creed, *I believe in God the Father ALMIGHTY* : And he that believes that first article, will the more easily believe all the rest. 3. God is much displeased even with his own children, when his power is questioned by them. For this God takes up Moses short, *Is the Lord's hand waxed short (a) ?* As if he had said, "What, Moses, dost thou think that my power is exhausted or weakened ? what an unworthy conceit is this ?" For this also Christ rebuked Martha very sharply : *Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God (b) ?* Yea, God is so tender of

(k) Heb. x. 31. (l) Psal. l. 22. Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.

(a) Numb. xi. 23. (b) John xi. 40.

of the glory of his power, that he hath sharply chastised his dear children, when their faith staggered in this matter: as we see in Zacharias, who, for questioning the power of God, was immediately stricken dumb upon the place. Well then, let it be your great care to have your faith confirmed in the belief of God's almighty power. For this end, ponder the verbal declarations made of it in the holy scriptures: Consider and improve the manifestations he hath given of it, both in your own and in former times: and pray much that God would strengthen and increase your faith.

Exhort. 2. Get a deep sense of God's glorious power upon your hearts. Why is it that God hath revealed himself so often under the title of Almighty, and presseth this upon us, but that we should press it upon ourselves? Consider, 1. A deep sense of the power of God is necessary. Without this you cannot pray believingly, for obtaining promised mercies, or averting threatened evils. You cannot trust in God, nor love him, nor fear him, unless you have a sense of his power. It is for want of this that the people of God are often turned from known duty by a fear of man: And without a due sense of God's power, we cannot practically suck the comfort of it. 2. A sense of the divine power is of great profit and advantage in the spiritual life. It yields no small relief to believing souls under strong temptations, and under the sense of powerful corruptions in their hearts. A deep sense of the power of God would render your faith more steadfast, your hope more lively, and your obedience more constant. It strengthens the soul for duty, and would make you go on in obedience without staggering, though great difficulties and dangers be in your way. This made Abraham go out, in obedience to the call of God; though he knew not *whither* he went, yet he knew *with whom* he went, *God Almighty* (c). 3. A deep sense of the power of God is that which we may get and retain without much difficulty. How can we shun a sense of that which every thing about us and within us is a mark of? Some of you have experienced the workings of the divine power in your new creation; in renewing you by his grace, bringing down the strong holds of sin, and drawing you to Christ. It was his mighty power over himself that gave rise to his patience toward you, and his pardoning grace conferred on you: So that you cannot shun the sense of his power, if you be not wanting to yourselves.

For this end, I recommend frequent and deep thoughts of the

(c) Heb. xi. 8.

the power of God; meditate upon it, and press it upon your minds. Contemplate the discoveries he hath made of it in his works of creation and providence. And be still enlarging the power of God in your thoughts: Though he hath done great things, yet he hath power still to do greater.

Exhort. 3. Get a saving interest in this Almighty God. Take him for your God in Christ. He puts forth the power of his Godhead for the good of his own people. Hence it is said, *The Lord of Hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel (d)*. When God is yours, then his power is yours, to help, defend, preserve, and deliver you, and to perform all things for you. When he is your God, he will be your friend: and his infinite power renders his friendship highly valuable. O, what cannot he do for you? If he be for you, you need not be afraid whoever be against you. Therefore make it your great business to have him for your friend. For this end, get a deep sense of your natural enmity against God: Confess with humility and brokenness of heart all your former rebellions against him: Lay down the weapons of your rebellion, by renouncing all iniquity: And flee to Christ, embrace and close with him by faith; for it is he alone that can bring you into friendship and favour with God.

Exhort. 4. Let us reverence and adore the Great God on the account of his infinite power. We usually reverence men of great power, and pay an awful regard to them: And shall we not much more adore and reverence him, who is matchless in power, and whose power cannot be controlled? Though we ourselves had not been amongst the monuments of his power, yet we should give him the honour and adoration that so great an excellency requires. The power of all creatures come infinitely short of his power, yea, is but weakness in comparison of it. Therefore the reverence and respect due to the mightiest among men, comes far short of what the divine power may justly challenge at our hand. Even such things as are void of understanding have struck men with such a reverence, that many have adored them as gods, as conceiving a mighty power in them: O then, what reverence and adoration doth the mighty power of God plead for at our hands.

Exhort. 5. Improve the consideration of God's almighty power, to encourage you to trust in him, to quicken you to prayer, to fortify your soul against the fear of man, to beget
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and cherish a holy fear of God, and to promote holy humility and submission of spirit.

First, To encourage you to trust in God. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (e). The psalmist seldom speaks of the power of God in creation, but he improves it as an encouragement to trust in him. As in that text, Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. — Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help: whose hope is in the Lord his God: who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is (f). What difficulty can nonplus his strength who made all things of nothing? Therefore trust in God on the account of his power; rest and rely upon it. Believe that what he hath promised, he is able also to perform (g). With respect to mercies absolutely promised, you should trust his power absolutely: For such promises shall be accomplished, because God is able. This is the apostle's argument, They shall be grafted in: For God is able to graft them in again (h). But with respect to these blessings that are only conditionally promised; magnify the power of God, and refer the matter to his will: As that poor leper, who said, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean (i). Though you know not what the Lord will do for you, or what he may see meet for your good, yet give him the glory of his power. Trust him in the greatest straits and difficulties. No difficulties that lie in the way of the accomplishment of the promises should weaken your faith: For though the accomplishment be unlikely to reason, yet God is able. Therefore though, in great dangers and difficulties, you can see no way to escape, yet magnify the power of God: As the three children did; Our God whom we serve, say they, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace (k). Again, let faith rest on the mighty power of God, in the lowest state of the church. God can raise her up, even when her case is desperate in the eye of man. He can make the dry bones to live (l). There are two great things God hath promised, the conversion of the Jews, and the fall of mystical Babylon: But great difficulties lie in the way of both. How shall the Jews be brought in again, when they are scattered through the world, and we know not where they are? The apostle answers, God is able to graft them in again (m). How shall Baby-

(e) Isa. xxvi. 3. (f) Psal. cxlvi. 3, 5, 6. (g) Rom. iv. 21.
 (h) Rom. xi. 23. (i) Matth. viii. 2. (k) Dan. iii. 17.
 (l) Ezek. xxxvii. (m) Rom. xi. 23.

Ion fall, when she is supported by the combined interests and power of so many princes? The Spirit of God answers, *Strong is the Lord God who judgeth her* (n).

In prosecuting this purpose a little, I shall, 1. Lay down some things by way of motive and argument, to persuade you to trust upon the power of God, in the greatest straits and difficulties, whether in your own or the church's case. 2. Propose some directions to this purpose.

1. To quicken and engage you to trust upon the power of God in the greatest straits and difficulties, I propose these considerations.

Consid. 1. The power of God is the great foundation of trust. There are three foundations of trust, God's mercy, in making the promise; his truth, in minding to make good the promise; and his power, in the accomplishment of it: Or, as an old father expresth it *, "The readiness of grace, the truth of the promise, and the power of performance." But, especially the truth and power of God are the two great supporters of faith. Sarah's faith, and Abraham's faith, do well together. Sarah relied upon the truth and faithfulness of God; *She judged him faithful who had promised* (a): And Abraham relied upon the power of God; *Being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able also to perform* (p). The truth of God is the warrant of our faith; but his power to make good the promise, is the proper ground and foundation of it. Hence faith on God is called a *trusting on his arm* (q). His mercy could not succour us, nor his goodness relieve us, nor his wisdom guide us, nor his truth make good the promises to us, without his power: So that there can be no trusting in God, without an eye to his power. Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose faith was tried above most of the saints before or after them, had this attribute displayed to them for the support of their faith: *God appeared unto them by the name of God Almighty* (r).

Consid. 2. Believers in Christ have great encouragement to trust in God, and to rely upon his power, in the greatest straits and difficulties. As, 1. It is a great encouragement that the power of God stands engaged for you. God is yours, therefore his power and might is yours, to be set a-work for your good. This is the reason of that expression, *Be strong in the Lord*,

(n) Rev. xviii. 8.

* *Tria considero, quibus tota spes mea consistit, charitatem adoptionis, veritatem promissionis, & potestatem redditiois.* Bernard.

(a) Heb. xi. 11. (p) Rom. iv. 21. (q) Isa. li. 5. (r) Exod. vi. 3.

Lord, and in the power of his might (1). His power stands engaged for you by covenant and promise; and the near relations wherein he stands to you, and his dear love to you, engage his power for you. 2. It is also a great encouragement, that God delights to glorify his power in his workings for and toward his people. This is one end for which he hath in all ages brought his church and people into great straits, that his power might be magnified in their deliverance, when their power and strength was gone, and that they might have nothing else but his power to trust to. To this purpose is that of the apostle, *We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead* (1). Yea, God oftentimes suffers a contrary power to arise, even at that very juncture of time, when he intends a great deliverance for his people, that his mighty arm may be stretched out on their behalf. For this end, he raised up Pharaoh, a proud tyrant, to oppress his people, when the time of their deliverance was at hand. *And in very deed, says the Lord, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power, and that my name may be declared in all the earth* (2). 3. Another great encouragement is, that your trusting in God in straits and difficulties, will engage his power for your help and relief. *My heart trusted in him, says the psalmist, and I am helped* (3). Hence the psalmist pleads this as an argument, *Preserve me, O God: For in thee do I put my trust* (4). Faith in the power of God is so pleasing to him, that such as exercise it shall never be ashamed. When you trust on the power of God, if what you desire be not done for you, it is because it is not good for you: So that such as trust upon the power of God cannot miscarry; whatever cometh to them is best.

Consid. 3. Trusting in God on the account of his power hath many special advantages. As, 1. This will keep you straight and upright in the way of God, so that you will not turn aside, nor use carnal shifts for your own safety. Hence the Lord says to Abraham, *I am God Almighty: walk before me, and be thou perfect* (5). How desperate-like soever the case be, this will relieve you, and keep you sincere, "I trust in God, who is able to provide for his own glory, and for my relief and safety."

2. It will inspire your soul with holy courage for God in the face of danger; as it did the three children (6). The apostle

(1) Eph. vi. 10. (2) 2 Cor. i. 9. (3) Exod. ix. 16.
 (4) Psal. xxviii. 7. (5) Psal. xvi. 1. (6) Gen. xvii. 1.
 (7) Dan. iii. 16, 17, 18.

poor Paul also did both labour and suffer reproach because he trusted in the living God (b). In times of danger, we grow cowardly and faint-hearted, and carnal hopes and fears turn us aside, when we do not see ourselves folded in the arms of the Almighty. 3. It will free your soul of a great many anxieties and perplexities. When you are once set upon this rock, you will not be tossed with the uncertain waves of anxious and disquieting thoughts. God will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is fixed on him, because he trusteth in him. Therefore, Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (c). In threatening times, you can never be freed from tempestuous agitations of spirit which toss you to and fro, till you cast yourselves entirely upon the mighty power of God.

Confid. 4. Not to trust upon the power of God is a very great evil. And, 1. Nothing more hinders the discoveries of his power than this. Hence it is said, *He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief* (d); or, as it is elsewhere expressed, *He could do there no mighty work* (e). So that unbelief doth in a sort put a bar in the way of Omnipotency; as is very plainly implied in what our Lord says to Martha, *Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God* (f). When you do not believe, when you do not trust in the power of God; this is the cause why he doth not put forth his power on your behalf. 2. When you cannot trust upon the power of God, but run to carnal shifts in times of danger, this engageth his power against you. As God sent a storm after Jonah, when out of distrust he run from his Master's work: So when in times of danger, you dare not trust on the power of God, but run from your duty, and betake yourselves to indirect courses and carnal shifts, you will thereby run into many inconveniences, and mischief sooner or later shall overtake you.

Confid. 5. Trusting in God on the account of his power glorifies him. So it is said of Abraham, *that he was strong in faith giving glory to God: Being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform* (g). You magnify his power, and give him the glory of it, when you trust in it. You do thereby sanctify God in the eyes of the world. Hence the prophet exhorts, *Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let*

(b) 1 Tim. iv. 10. (c) Isa. xxvi. 3, 4. (d) Matth. xiii. 58.
(e) Mark vi. 5. (f) John xi. 40. (g) Rom. iv. 20, 21.

let him be your dread (b). And how angry was God with his dear saints, Moses and Aaron, because they failed so to do; *Because ye believed me not, says he, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel: therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them (i).* O how dear should the glory of God be to you?

Confid. 6. We are under greater engagements and obligations to trust on the power of God, than the ancient patriarchs and other Old Testament saints: Because we have, not only these discoveries and manifestations of the power of God, which they had, but also divers superadded demonstrations of it, in Christ's conception and birth; in the uniting the two natures in his person; in supporting the human nature under his sufferings; in raising him from the dead; and in propagating the gospel, against all the power and wisdom of the world. If they trusted on the power of God, though they had not these clearer manifestations of it, what a shame will it be for us to distrust him?

2. Let me give a few directions what to do that you may trust upon the power of God in the greatest straits and difficulties. As,

(1). Meditate deeply and frequently of the power of God, and press the sense of it upon your hearts, as I formerly exhorted you. Consider how much his power can outwork all your thoughts: For, *he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think (k).* Hence the Lord silenceth the doubts of his people with that question, *If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of Hosts (l).* Remember and ponder his power in creation; and never be discouraged, while you have these two great monuments of God's power, the heaven and the earth, before your eyes. On this ground the people of God raise up their confidence in him; *Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (m).*

(2). Improve your own and the church's experiences for the confirmation of your faith. And, 1. Consider how God hath glorified his power in the behalf of his church and people in former ages, especially upon their trusting in him. The psalmist considers this for the confirmation of his faith; *Our fathers, says he, trusted in thee: They trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: They trusted in thee, and were not confounded (n).* And the church pleads former

(b) Isa. viii. 12, 13. (i) Numb. xx. 12. (k) Eph. iii. 20.
(l) Zech. viii. 6. (m) Psal. cxxiv. 8. (n) Psal. xlii. 4, 5.

former experiences: *Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rachab, and wounded the dragon (v)?* So that the experiences that the church hath had of the power of God in former straits and dangers, are of great use to strengthen our trust. Precedents in law are good pleas. 2. Improve your own experiences. Experiences of the power of God in his dealings with ourselves are a great confirmation of our faith. Hence the apostle says, *Who delivered us from so great a death, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us (p).* Frequent trial useth to strengthen our trust. Abraham's experience was a great confirmation to his faith. It is said of him, *He accounted that God was able to raise up his son, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure (q).* He had received Isaac, as it were, from the dead at the first, from his own dead body, and from Sarah's dead womb: And this confirmed his faith in the power of God, to raise him from the dead, though he were slain. Well then, consider what God hath done for you, and what experiences you have had of the power of God, in helping, saving, and delivering you, in former straits and difficulties. Especially, consider your gracious experiences. We read of the exceeding greatness of his power toward them that believe (r). Some of you have had gracious experiences of the power of God, in renewing and changing your hearts, in making your stubborn souls strike sail to Jesus Christ, in supporting you under various trials and temptations, in baffling Satan's power, and in overpowering your spiritual lusts. Improve such experiences for your encouragement to trust in him for farther gracious effects of his power.

(3.) Consult not with sense and reason. It is said of Abraham, *He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God (s).* How this came to pass, we are told in the preceding verse: *He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not regard what sense and reason might suggest in contradiction to the promise. When Zacharias had the promise of a Son, he staggered, because he consulted with sense and reason: He thought he was too old for such news to be true. When sense and reason seem to contradict the promise, then, as the Jewish proverb*

(v) Isa. li. 9.
(r) Eph. i. 19.

(p) 2 Cor. i. 10.
(s) Rom. iv. 20.

(q) Heb. xi. 19.

proverb is, *shut the windows, and the house will be light*: That is, shut the eyes of sense and reason, and things will be more clear to the eye of faith. Remember that God's power is not tied to the order of second causes, much less to the road of human probabilities. He will rather turn nature upside-down, than not be as good as his word: For he hath *magnified his word above all his name* (f).

(4.) Trust on the power of God through Christ the Mediator. To this purpose the apostle expresseth himself, *Such trust have we through Christ to God-ward* (u). It is through Christ that the power of God stands engaged for you who are his children: And his power is exercised on your behalf only on the account of Christ's mediation. Therefore rest and rely on him for such discoveries and manifestations of the power of God as he hath promised in the covenant. Be sure always to own the blessed Mediator, in whom *all the promises are yea and amen* (x).

S E R M O N XXVII.

✓ *Second,* **I**MPROVE the consideration of God's almighty power, to encourage you to prayer, and to strengthen your faith in it. It is certainly a great encouragement, that in prayer we go to a God of infinite power, one who hath all power in his hand, and is able to do what we ask of him, yea, *exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*. Therefore the Lord's Prayer is concluded with a doxology of God's power; *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory*. This is the great encouragement: As God hath a kingdom, and possesseth all blessings; so he hath power to confer these blessings on us. Hence, our blessed Lord built his confidence in prayer upon this foundation: *he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death* (a). And the saints consider the power of God, to strengthen their faith in prayer; as the prophet, *Ab, Lord God, behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power, and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee* (b): And, says Jehoshaphat, *O Lord God, in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee* (c)? And the church pleads

cannot

(f) Psal. cxxxviii. 2. (u) 2 Cor. iii. 4. (x) 2 Cor. i. 20.
(a) Heb. v. 7. (b) Jer. xxxii. 17. (c) 2 Chron. xx. 6.

with God, to act according to the greatness of his power (d). We cannot pray in faith of success, unless we believe and consider the power of God: Yea, without this we shall soon weary of prayer. Who would address himself to one that is not able to help? When a poor subject cried to a mortal king, *Help, my lord, O king*; he answered, *Whence shall I help thee* (e)? What heart could we have to go to a God that cannot help? There is more hope of help from one that is unwilling, than from one that is unable. I add, that the power of God is the great foundation of faith and trust; and it is in prayer that faith is particularly to be acted.

Well then, in all your addresses to God, eye his mighty power, for your encouragement, and the confirmation of your faith; that you may pray with confidence and hope, even in the most difficult and desperate-like cases. "I go to a God that is able to help me, let my straits and miseries be never so great." When you pray for the pardon of great sins, the subduing of strong corruptions, the strengthening you under powerful temptations, the cleansing of your filthy souls; still eye the power of God, and say, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean* (f). When you pray for strength and nourishment to your weak graces, still consider God as able to make all grace abound toward you (g). Let this hold up your hearts and hands, and give you confidence toward God, that he hath all power in his hand.

Third, Improve the consideration of God's almighty power, to fortify your soul against the fear of man. It appears, from this doctrine about the power of God, that the fear of man is most unreasonable, and most dishonourable to God. 1. It is most unreasonable: For weak man is no party for the mighty God; therefore, if God be for you, what need you fear who be against you? On this ground the psalmist triumphs over his fears: *The Lord is my light and my salvation*, says he, *whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid* (h)? How unreasonable is it, to fear a finite and limited power, more than an infinite and unbounded power? Hence our Saviour exhorts, *Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (i). If God be yours,

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then

(d) Psal. lxxix. 11.

(e) 2 Kings vi. 26, 27.

* *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales confesserent, allo quendi furda nu mina & inefficaces Deos.* Sen.

(f) Matth viii. 25

(g) 2 Cor. ix. 8.

(h) Psal. xxvii. 1.

(i) Matth. x. 28.

then he is still with you, to strengthen and uphold you against the pride and power of man; so that you need not fear. Ponder that glorious promise, *Fear thou not, for I am with thee: Be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (k)*. How unreasonable is it to tremble at the frowns and threats of a frail man, when you have the mighty God to be your guard? 2. The fear of man is most dishonourable to God, as if he were unable to secure and protect us in the way of our duty. It argues a forgetfulness of God. Therefore he speaks of it with so much disdain: *Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man, who shall be made as grass: and forgettest the Lord thy Maker (l)?* We vilify God, and defile his glory, when our fear of man's power stifles our faith in God, as is implied in that exhortion: *Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread (m)*.

Well then, having a God of infinite power, let us not fear our own or the church's enemies. He can secure his church against the power and policy of hell. He is able to control the resolves of enemies, to break their projects, and confound their counsels. He can change their fury into favour, or bound and bridle it as he doth the waves of the sea.

Fourth, Improve it, to beget and cherish in your hearts a holy fear of God. We fear men of great power, and shall we not much more fear him, who hath all power in his hand, and can ruin us eternally, when he pleases. To this purpose is that of our Saviour, *I will forswear you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him (n)*. Indeed, the serious consideration of the power of God, cannot but influence us to a holy fear of him. The prophet concludes so: *Thou art great, and thy name is great in might: Who would not fear thee, O King of nations (o)?* And so doth Elihu: *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: He is excellent in power. Men do therefore fear him (p)*. Shall we not fear and tremble before him, who can arm our wit and hands against ourselves, and can conquer the proudest monarchs by the meanest of his creatures? Shall we not fear him whose glorious power glitters in the works of his hands? Hence the Lord expostu-
lates

(k) Isa. xli. 10. (l) Isa. li. 12, 13. (m) Isa. viii. 12, 13.
(n) Luke xii. 5. (o) Jer. x. 6, 7. (p) Job xxxvii. 23, 24.

lates with that people: *Fear ye not me, saith the Lord? Will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bounds of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it* (q). Let none say, that this is not the temper of the children of God: For even the glorious angels fear and reverence him on the account of his power, though they are past the fear of any danger by it. They reverence him with *covered faces*, not only for his holiness, but for his power, as he is *the Lord of Hosts* (r). I do not press a slavish fear of God, a fear of him as an enemy; but a holy filial fear: Not a fear that drives from him, but that which makes us draw near to him; a fear of reverence; a fear consistent with love; such a fear as may make you careful to please him, and wary and cautious that you do not offend him *. Be afraid to provoke him by your sins, or by hardening yourselves in a rebellious course. Oh, will you bid defiance to the Almighty? *Shall not his excellency make you afraid, and his dread fall upon you.* O take heed of engaging this mighty God against you. By sins committed against him, you may draw almighty power about your ears. And I add, that this holy fear of God, as it will be an excellent preservative from sin, so it will be a notable antidote against the fear of man, as is plainly implied in some of these texts already quoted †.

Fifth, Improve it, to promote holy humility and submission of spirit. *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God* (s). How becoming is humility under a mighty hand? Consider, 1. How easily God can ruin you by his power. Men fawn upon them that have great power: But such is the power of God, that he can ruin you by a breath. Hence Eliphaz says of wicked men, *By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils they are consumed* (t). He can do it with a frown. *They perish*, says the psalmist, *at the rebuke of thy countenance* (u). It is no difficult thing for God to turn you into hell by the breath of his mouth. The infinite disproportion between God's mightiness and your weakness, should make you stoop.

2. You

(q) Jer. v. 22.

(r) Isa. vi. 2, 3.

* Laertius saith of Cleanthes, *Cum aliquando probro illi daretur, quod esset timidus; at ideo, inquit, parum pecco.*

† *Discat timere, qui non vult timere.* August.

Homo, time deum, dominantem mundum ridabis. Idem.

(s) 1 Pct. v. 6.

(t) Job. iv. 9.

(u) Psal. lxxx. 16.

2. You shall feel this mighty hand, if you do not stoop to it. Pride, murmuring and resistance, exasperate and sharpen power. God will bring down the haughty spirit. *The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down* (x). If we do not humble ourselves, the mighty hand of God will humble us to our cost. God hath sworn, *As I live, every knee shall bow to me* (y). As if he had said, Count me not a living God, if I do not make the creature stoop.

3. True humiliation of soul will engage the mighty power of God to work for you. Humility under, and submission to a mighty hand, is the best policy and security you sanctify God's name, and glorify his strength, when you fall down before it. It is an acknowledgment of his mighty power, and of your own nothingness before him. And when you do thus sanctify his name, and give him the glory of his strength, then his power is engaged for your security: For he hath promised to *exalt* the humble (z); and he is able to make good what he hath promised. Though your condition were never so low, yet he that created the world at first, can create a happy state for you, when you humble yourselves in his presence. How suddenly can he change the darkest night into the clearest day.

Use 5. For encouragement, to sensible sinners under the power of sin, to go to God, and to wait on him for renewing and regenerating grace. When conscience is awakened, the sense of inveterate and rooted distempers and corruptions raiseth great fears, so that the soul is apt to entertain despairing thoughts: "How is it possible, that this stubborn will can be subdued, or this hard heart softened, or this vain mind made serious, or these bewitching lusts renounced?" The soul apprehends a mighty difficulty in parting with sin. Such is the perverseness of your natures, the power of your corruptions, and the strength of your spiritual distempers, that your conversion appears to you to be impossible; O how shall it ever be accomplished? But here is that which may answer all your doubts and fears; God is able to overcome your stubborn nature, to over-power your strong corruptions, to subdue your boisterous lusts, and to bring down the strong holds of sin. All this is easy to a God of infinite power. How shall the Jews be converted? The apostle answers, *God is able to graft them in again* (a). God can raise and quicken the

(x) Isa. ii. 11.

(y) Rom. xiv. 11.

(z) 1 Pet. v. 6.

(a) Rom. xi. 23.

dead (b). When our blessed Lord told his disciples of the difficulty of a rich man's salvation, *they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?* But he answered, *With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible* (c). We read of the *exceeding greatness of God's power toward them that believe* (d). There is a mighty power exerted in the conversion and regeneration of sinners, and turning them from sin to God. The consideration of this may afford no small relief to poor sensible sinners: What cannot this mighty power do for you? How easily can the Almighty God vanquish all resistance made in your heart against the power of his grace? And when you are persuaded of his power, this may give you some hope of his will also; so that you may go to God, and say, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean* (e).

Use 6. For comfort to believers in Christ. How comfortable is it that he who is your God, is a God of infinite power, and can do whatever he will? All created power is derived from him, and the exercise of it depends on him; so that you need not fear. His power is made over to you in the covenant. The great promise is, *I am your God*; which plainly implies this, *my power is yours*, seeing power is essential to his nature. How comfortable is it that all power is in his hand, who is your covenanted God and gracious Father? You may be confident that he will never exercise it to your disadvantage. Particularly,

1. It is comfortable, that there shall be an accomplishment of all the promises, whether these made to believers in particular, or these made to the church in general. *What he hath promised, he is able also to perform* (f). Hence his power and truth are joined together in that of the psalmist, *The Lord who made heaven and earth,—who keepeth truth for ever* (g). And when God promiseth to his church and people great things, and such things as were very difficult in human appearance to be performed, he proposeth his power to the consideration of his people, to strengthen their faith (h). Even honest men oft-times cannot make good their promises, because they want power: But God cannot come into such straits. *With him all things are possible. The Strength of Israel will not lie* (i). What can be too hard for him who made heaven and earth?

2. Here

(b) Rom. iv. 17. (c) Matth. xix. 25, 26. (d) Eph. i. 19.
 (e) Matth. viii. 2. (f) Rom. iv. 21. (g) Psal. cxlvi. 6.
 (h) See Isa. xl. 12, 26. xlii. 5. and xliv. 24. (i) Mark x. 27.
 1 Sam. xv. 29.

2. Here is ground of comfort to believers under the most heavy pressures of affliction. The psalmist, under trouble, supports and encourages his confidence in God, by the consideration of his power: *My help, says he, cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (k)*. How great soever your straits and difficulties are, he hath power sufficient for your relief. He that made heaven and earth of nothing, can send help, when there is no visible appearance of it. How desperate-like soever your case be, he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think (l). He can support and strengthen you under trouble, and deliver you out of trouble. He can bring order out of your confusion, and light out of darkness.

3. Here is matter of comfort against strong corruptions and temptations. When you consider what powerful enemies you have to do with, your heart is apt to sink within you. But remember, that your God is able to secure you, and to make you victorious. He can make his strength perfect in your weakness (m). When you are sore assaulted, and like to be over-powered, this may support your soul, that he who is Almighty is ready to come in for your relief in the battle. Hence the apostle exhorts believers, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might (n).

4. This may comfort you, in the sense of your own weakness and inability for what is good. The sense of your own weakness and insufficiency doth sometimes prove a great discouragement, especially when you are called to great and weighty duties, and special service to God; so that you are apt to draw back, and to give it over, as Jonah run from his Master's work. But remember, the strength of God stands engaged for you, when he sets you about any work. Therefore encourage thyself with what God said to Gideon, *Go in this thy might (o)*. Go on, relying on the strength of God. Say with the psalmist, *I will go in the strength of the Lord God (p)*: and with the apostle, *I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me (q)*.

5. Here is ground of comfort against all your fears of total or final apostacy. How great soever your own weakness be to grapple with the mighty opposition that is in your way: yet God is able to keep you from falling (r). This may assure you of the certainty of your perseverance, that the invincible power

(k) Psal. cxxi. 2. (l) Eph. iii. 20. (m) 2 Cor. xii. 9.
 (n) Eph. vi. 10. (o) Judges vi. 14. (p) Psal. lxxi. 16.
 (q) Phil. iv. 13. (r) Jude 24.

power of God is employed for your preservation: For, ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation (s). Hence the apostle says of the weak Christian, *He shall be holden up: For God is able to make him stand* (t). Ye are in his custody, whose power is above all opposition. *My sheep, says Christ, shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand* (u). Your keeping is not in your own hand, but in the hand of him who is mighty to save. What need you fear, who are enfolded in the arms of Omnipotency? Can infinite power be beaten out of breath by the wrestling of the devil? Your soul is in safe custody and keeping. Being committed to Christ, it is in safe hands: For he is able to keep that which you have committed unto him against that day (x). And your soul is so in Christ's hand, that it is also in the Father's hand; both their hands are about it, and hold it fast, so that it cannot be lost. Some of you have already had many experiences of the power of divine grace this way, you may set up your Ebenezers: And he that hath kept you hitherto, is able to keep you still.

6. Hence the people of God may be comforted in the low or dangerous state of the church. When the dangers or distresses of the church are great, the people of God are apt to entertain despairing thoughts about her; as the Jews did in Babylon: *Behold, said they, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts* (y). But how comfortable is it, that Zion's God is a God of infinite power. His love to his church, and the relations wherein he stands to her, engage his power in her behalf: And it is his promise, that *in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest* (z). That is, that his power shall be continually employed for the church against her enemies. He is *the Strength of Israel* (a). And what cannot almighty power do for the protection and deliverance of the church? This is a river which, in the church's straitest siege, shall make glad the city of God with seasonable succours from heaven. One great end, in his delivering and saving his church, is the manifestation of his power. So it was in the delivering the children of Israel: *He saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known* (b). Therefore, he sometimes brings his church very low, till her case

(s) 1 Pet. i. 5. (t) Rom. xiv. 4. (u) John x. 28, 29.
 (x) 2 Tim. i. 12. (y) Ezek. xxxvii. 11. (z) Isa. xlv. 10.
 (a) 1 Sam. xv. 29. (b) Psal. cxi. 8.

case is desperate-like in the eye of man, that his power may be the more conspicuous in her deliverance. As he hath in all ages protected and delivered his church in the greatest dangers; so he can act over again all the glorious deliverances that ever he wrought: For his arm is not shortened that it cannot save; and the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary (c). And his power extends even to the hearts, thoughts, and minds of men. Hence the psalmist says of his people, that God made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives (d). He hath the hearts of enemies in his hand, to turn and change them at his pleasure: He can move or incline them to give or follow what counsel he pleaseth, for bringing about his own ends. He can bridle the rage and fury of enemies: As he says of Sennacherib, *I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest* (e). He can restrain the remainder of their wrath (f). He can easily break their power, and take heart and hand from them. For he leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. He removeth away the speech of the trusty; and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth (g). Such is his power, that he can deliver his church easily, with a word. Hence the psalmist prays, *Thou art my King, command deliverances for Jacob* (h). And he can deliver her speedily, by way of surprisal; according to that of the prophet, *And behold at even-tide, trouble; and before the morning he is not* (i). That is, the enemy is not, being suddenly cut off. He can in a moment turn a dark night into a clear day. Well then, though the church of Christ, in divers places, be at this day brought very low, and though great dangers threaten the church of Christ at home: Yet let all the true friends of Zion take comfort from this, that *the Lord her God in the midst of her is mighty; and her Redeemer is strong, the Lord of Hosts is his name* (k). When the church meets with a strait in which he cannot deliver, or a yoke which he cannot break, or a burden which he cannot take off, or a Red-Sea which he cannot divide, or is pursued by a Pharaoh whom he cannot destroy; then, and not till then, give way to despondency and discouragement. Surely, the Almighty is too strong for all the mighties upon the earth. *If God be for us, who can be against us* (l).

DISCOURSE

- (c) Isa. lix. 1. and xl. 28. (d) Psal. cvii. 46. (e) Isa. xxxvii. 29. (f) Psal. lxxvi. 10. (g) Job xii. 19, 20, 21, 24. (h) Psal. xlv. 4. (i) Isa. xvii. 14. (k) Zeph. iii. 17. Jer. l. 34. (l) Rom. viii. 31.

DISCOURSE VII.

Of the Holiness of God.

SERMON XXVIII.

† Sam. ii. 2. *There is none holy as the Lord : For there is none beside thee.*

THESE words are a part of Hannah's Song of Thanksgiving to God for her son Samuel. She had prayed earnestly for a son, as we read in the preceding chapter, and now, having received him, her heart, under the sense of the divine goodness, is greatly enlarged in praise and thanksgiving to God. Every mercy received, lays us under a debt of praise, which is the rent and revenue of the crown of heaven : But mercies received, in answer to prayer, lay us under a double obligation, both as they are mercies, valuable in themselves, and as they are a return of prayer. And that we may the better perform this duty of praise, our hearts should be deeply affected with the goodness of God, that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth may speak, and that the heart, being enlarged and opened wide, may pour forth abundant praise.

Her Song of Thanksgiving is, in verse 1st, called a *prayer*, because thanksgiving is an essential part of prayer, and thanksgiving, for mercies received, is a kind of petitioning for new mercies, and is accepted of God as such. In the beginning of her Song, she expresseth her great joy in God on this occasion : *My heart rejoiceth in the Lord.* Next, she shews how much her praises were elevated, God having raised her reputation greatly, by giving her *such* a son as Samuel was : *Mine horn is exalted in the Lord : My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies.* And then she adds the ground and reason of all this : *Because I rejoice in thy salvation ;* whereby she understands, not simply God's giving her a son, whereby he had taken away her reproach among men ; but chiefly his giving her *such* a son as this, who should be an eminent instrument of the salvation of his people Israel, which salvation was typical of their spiritual and eternal salvation, to be brought about by Christ, which doubtless she had especially in her eye.

In verse 2d, her heart is, on this occasion, raised and enlarged

larged to praise God as a matchless and incomparable Being, and particularly for his matchless holiness. *There is none holy as the Lord.* She celebrates his holiness, because he had manifested the same, in his faithfulness, care, and kindness to her a holy person, by giving her a son, and such a son whom he had sanctified by his grace for service to him. She says not, *There is none holy BUT the Lord*; but, *there is none holy AS the Lord.* Others are holy; but they are not holy AS he is holy. He is holy beyond all compare: He is holy so as none else is holy. So it follows, *for there is none beside thee.* The word *holy* is easily understood and supplied here from the former clause: And so the sense may be this, not only there is none holy as thou art, but there is none holy beside thee. As *there is none good but God (a)*; so there is none holy but he. None is essentially, originally, infinitely, and immutably holy, but the Lord. The holiness of men and angels is none at all, comparatively to his. It is true, we are commanded to be *holy AS he is holy (b)*. But in the text, the particle *as* doth not denote an exact equality, but only some kind of resemblance. In point of resemblance, angels and saints are holy AS the Lord is holy: But, in point of equality, *there is none holy as the Lord.*

The doctrine I propose is this:

Matchless and incomparable holiness is one of the divine excellencies and perfections.

Here I am to discourse to you of the holiness of God. Indeed this is a subject more becoming the glorified spirits above, than vile polluted dust upon the earth: Yet God hath been pleased to give us some discoveries and manifestations of his own holiness, which he allows us to contemplate and discourse of. And it is one great part of a minister's work to hold forth to others his glorious excellencies, and particularly his matchless holiness. Therefore the four beasts, which represent the ministers of the church, are set forth as improving all opportunities for this end: *They rest not, day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come (c).* As ministers, being God's special attendants, are, above all men, to be deeply affected with a sense of the divine holiness, so they are most obliged to proclaim the praises of it. O that we could speak and hear of this subject, with reverence and godly fear, with holy hearts, and holy lips, and holy ears.

In

(a) Matth. xix. 17. (b) 1 Pet. i. 15: (c) Rev. iv. 8.

In prosecuting the doctrine, I shall shew you,

1. That God is holy.
2. What is the holiness of God; or what is the nature of this divine perfection.
3. That there is none holy but he; or that God is matchless and incomparable in his holiness.
4. Wherein God's matchless and incomparable holiness is manifested.
5. I shall apply the doctrine.

First, I am to shew that God is holy. Holiness is one of the divine perfections. He is called *the Holy One* about sixteen times in scripture; and *the Holy One of Israel* twenty and five times in the prophecies of Isaiah; and *the Holy One of Jacob*. This attribute is thrice repeated in the Song of the seraphims; as also by the four beasts, in their Song; where, according to some Greek copies, it is nine times, or thrice three times, repeated; wherein, doubtless, a respect is had to the Trinity of persons in the Godhead (*d*). Hence it is also, that this perfection is, by Joshua, attributed to God in the plural number, with a pronoun in the singular number: *He is an holy God* (*e*), says he: Orig. *Holies ones he*, as it is rendered in the margin of some Bibles. It is asserted of each person particularly: Of the Father; *Holy Father, keep through thine own name* (*f*), &c. Of the Son; *Thou wilt not suffer thine holy One to see corruption* (*g*): And he is called *the holy One of God*. It is asserted also of the Spirit; he is often called *the Holy Spirit*, and *the Holy Ghost* (*h*). And because of the holiness of God, therefore every thing related to him is called holy. As, 1. The place of his habitation. So, heaven is called *his holy temple*, and *his holy heaven* (*i*). Hence, these places where God manifested his presence in a special manner, are called holy. Jerusalem is called *the holy city* (*k*); the mount where Christ was transfigured, is called *the holy mount* (*l*); and the ground where the Lord appeared to Moses, is called *holy ground* (*m*). 2. His attendants are holy. His angels, *holy angels* (*n*); his ministers, *holy men of God* (*o*); and his people, *an holy people* (*p*). 3. All his worship and service is holy.

Worship

(*d*) Isa. xxix. 23. and vi. 3. Rev. iv. 8. (*e*) Josh. xxiv. 19. (*f*) John xvii. 11. (*g*) Psal. xvi. 10. (*h*) Luke i. 35. (*i*) Psal. xi. 4. and xx. 6. (*k*) Matth. iv. 5. (*l*) 2 Pet. i. 18. (*m*) Exod. iii. 5. (*n*) Matth. xxv. 31. Luke ix. 26. (*o*) 2 Pet. i. 21. Exod. xxviii. 36. Rev. xviii. 20. (*p*) Dan. xii. 7. Deut. vii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (q), says the psalmist. Hence it is applied to the special time of worship; the Sabbath-day is called God's *holy day* (r): and to the place of worship; the temple is called *his holy temple* (s). And to the several parts and courts of the temple; and to all the persons and things appertaining to it, as priests, Levites, altars, sacrifices, incense, oil, and other things which were for sacred uses, all are called holy. 4. His word is holy. *The holy scriptures. The law is holy*. And God's covenant, contained in the scriptures, is called *his holy covenant* (t).

We see then how the scriptures set forth the holiness of God: And he must needs be holy, 1. Because of the infinite perfection of his nature. Holiness is a perfection in the creature; therefore it must be eminently and infinitely in an infinitely perfect Being. Yea, it is an excellency which ought to be in every intellectual being. 2. Because of his perfect blessedness. Holiness and blessedness are inseparable. An unholy man can never be blessed, though he were in heaven itself. So God could not be blessed, if he were not holy. Yea, his blessedness consists much in his perfect purity. Hence the gospel, wherein his holiness is signally discovered, is called *the glorious gospel of the blessed God* (u). 3. God hath made creatures holy; therefore he himself must be much more holy. The holiness of angels and men springs from him. He is *the Lord that sanctifies us* (x): Therefore it must be eminently and infinitely in himself. Can the fountain be muddy, when the springs are pure? Surely the fountain of all holiness must itself be most pure. 4. Even the Heathens have been led, by nature's light, to own this perfection of the divine nature. Hence they asserted that virtue was an imitation of God, and that a virtuous man bore a resemblance to God. And in regard of that esteem which they had for their gods, they called them *holy gods* (y). One calls God *the undefiled Governor of the world* †. And a Heathen philosopher ‡ called holiness *the beauty of the Divine Essence*; and said, that *God was not so happy by an eternity of life, as by an excellency of virtue*.

Before I leave this head, I shall add two observations upon the holiness of God, taken from the holy scriptures. *Ques.* 1. Holiness is a chief and super-eminent perfection of God;

(q) Psal. xxix. 2. (r) Isa. lviii. 13. (s) Jonah ii. 4, 7.
(t) 2 Tim. iii. 15 Rom. vii. 12. Luke i. 72. (u) 1 Tim. i. 11.
(x) Lev. xx. 8. (y) Dan. iv. 8, 9.

† Ἀκατάστατος ὁ Θεός. Proclus. ‡ Plutarch.

God; that wherein the divine excellency doth chiefly consist. Therefore it is the most frequent epithet given to his name in scripture. We never read *mighty name*, or *wise name*; but frequently, *holy name*. This is his greatest title of honour; that wherein the divine Majesty is most illustrious. The holiness of God is his *glory* and *beauty*. Therefore he is said to be *glorious in holiness* (z). He is *mighty* in power, and *rich* in grace, but *glorious* in holiness. It renders him glorious in himself, and glorious to all that understand what holiness is. It is the most beautiful perfection of God. Power is his arm; omniscience, his eye; mercy, his bowels; grace, his riches; but holiness is his beauty. Hence it is said, *They praised the beauty of holiness* (a). Therefore, the holiness of God is the attribute that he delights most to honour: He will have the mouths of angels and saints filled with the praises of it. The *seraphims*, and the *four beasts*, praise his holiness, saying, *Holy, holy, holy* (b). We do not find any other attribute so often repeated: It is never said, *Wise, wise, wise*; or *Merciful, merciful, merciful*. Hence it is also that God singles out this attribute to swear by, as if he were more concerned for the honour of it, than of all the rest: *Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David* (c). He lays his holiness in pawn for the accomplishment of his promise, as the attribute most dear to him. *Obs. 2.* Holiness is so necessary a perfection of God, that his other perfections would be none without it. It is the lustre and beauty of all the other perfections of his nature. His power or arm is *holy*. His truth or promise is an *holy promise*. His name, which signifies all his attributes in conjunction, is a *holy name* (d). A vein of holiness runs through his whole name. So, his wisdom is a holy wisdom; his justice a holy justice; his patience a holy patience. All would be uncomely, without holiness to adorn them. Without holiness *, his wisdom would be subtilty, his justice cruelty, his sovereignty tyranny, his mercy foolish pity, his forbearance an indulgence to sin, and his wrath madness. Though we conceive him infinite in his being, wisdom, power; yet if we conceive him destitute of holiness, we conceive him but an infinite monster, which is worse than to deny his being.

Second, I proceed to shew, what the holiness of God is, or, what is the nature of this divine perfection. I shall endeavour to explain this both negatively and positively.

Negatively.

(z) Exod. xv. 11. (a) 2 Chron. xx. 21. (b) Isa. vi. 3. Rev. iv. 8. (c) Psal. lxxxix. 35. (d) Isa. lii. 10. Psal. cv. 42. and ciii. 1.

* Mr. Scudder.

Negatively. The holiness of God is his perfect freedom from all spot and blemish. In this respect his holiness is called his purity. Holiness implies a freedom from sin and defilement: The Greek word which signifies holy †, is derived from a privative particle ‡, and a word which signifies earth §; and so it denotes one in whom there is no earth, no pollution. So, God is holy, that is, he is perfectly free from all impurity and contagion. He is *without iniquity*; and *there is no unrighteousness in him*. As *with him there is no shadow of turning (e)*; so in him there is no shadow of evil. Hence, he is called *light*, as impurity is called *darkness*: *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (f)*. He is a pure and unmixed light, without the least mote of darkness.

Positively. God's holiness is the perfect rectitude and integrity of the divine essence, whereby in all that he doth, he acts like himself, and for himself, delighting in whatever is agreeable to his will and nature, and abhorring whatever is contrary thereunto.

According to this description, God's holiness may be considered, 1. With respect to himself. 2. With respect to the creatures.

1. With respect to himself. And so his holiness includes his acting like himself and for himself.

(1.) His acting in all things like himself, in a becomingness to his excellent being and glorious perfections. Created holiness is but a resemblance of God's holiness. Now, created holiness lies in a conformity to the law and will of God as the rule: But God is a rule or law unto himself, there being no eternal reasons of good and evil beyond God; Therefore his holiness lies in a conformity to himself. He conforms to his own essence; doth all congruously to his own excellency; acts always like himself; whatever he doth, he doth in such a manner as becomes him. All his decrees and dispensations are congruous to the glorious perfections of his nature: They are such as are worthy of and becoming such a Being, a self-existent, self-sufficient, independent, unchangeable, infinitely wise, and infinitely blessed Being. Hence it is that no spot, no indecency or irregularity, can possibly happen to him. He cannot do evil through ignorance, because of his infinite knowledge; nor through weakness, because of his infinite power; nor through malice, because of his infinite rectitude; he can neither will nor do any thing incongruous to

to

† ἅγιος. ‡ ἀ-. § γῆ.
(e) Deut. xxxii. 4. Psal. xcii. 15. James i. 17. (f) 1 John i. 5.

to himself. He cannot lie, or repent, or deny himself. He would hate himself, if in any thing he acted contrary to his glorious perfections; because then he would disagree with himself. Nothing pleaseth him, nothing is acted by him, but what is becoming the infinite excellency of his nature.

(2.) His acting in all things for himself, for his own glory. His glory is the end of all his works; *for of him, and through him, and to him are all things.* He is *Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last* (g). As he is the first principle of all things, so he must be the last end of them. His holiness requires that all his works should return and give glory to their original. This is the glorious excellency of his nature, that he doth all things for himself, for his own glory. In this respect his holiness is transcendent above the holiness of all creatures. Self-seeking in creatures is monstrous and incongruous. For men to seek their own glory, is not glory, but rather matter of shame: But for God to seek his own glory, is his eminent excellency; it is indeed his glory, because he is, and there is none else. To do all things for one's self, which in man is idolatry, is true sanctity in him. It is his royal prerogative, a peculiar right of the Deity, to be his own end, and to act for his own glory.

S E R M O N XXIX.

2. **G**OD's holiness may be considered with respect to the creatures: And so it includes these two things.

(1.) His infinite love to and delight in what is agreeable to his nature and will. Holiness in the creature is a likeness to God; therefore it is called *godliness* or *God-likeness*. Created holiness is a participation of the divine nature (a): It is God's image in the reasonable creature. More of the glory and beauty of God shines forth in it than in all the world besides. Now, the holy One, who loves himself, must needs love so excellent a picture of his own holiness: *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright* (b). God would not be holy, if he did not love holiness in the creatures. As he loves himself, so he cannot but ardently love whatever hath any stamp or image of his own nature upon it.

(2.) His infinite hatred and abhorrence of whatever is contrary to his holy will and nature; and that is nothing else but sin. Sin is most opposite and contrary to God, to his being,

(g) Rom. xi. 36. Rev. i. 8, 17.

(a) 2 Pet. i. 4. Eph. iv. 24. (b) Psal. xi. 7.

to his nature, and to all his glorious perfections. It is against his honour and interest: It is a contempt of his authority, a denial of his sovereignty, and a disgrace to his holiness. There is *enmity against God* (c) in the very nature of it. It strikes at his very being, in the nature of the thing, though not always in the intention of the sinner. Therefore he hates it with a perfect hatred. Sin is *that abominable thing which he hates*. He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness (d). The expression is figurative: More is implied than is expressed. God hath no pleasure in sin; that is, he is highly displeased with it; he hates and abhors it: As the psalmist declares, *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness* (e). His hatred of sin is as essential to him, as his love of righteousness. He is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity* (f). As when we hate and abhor a thing, we turn away our eyes from it, and cannot endure to look upon it: So, sin is so hateful to God, that the purity of his holy nature is averse from beholding it.

But what is hatred of sin, as it is attributed to God? If we consider hatred as it in us, a passion of the soul, so it is not in God; the absolute perfection of his nature excludes it. But positively, God's hatred of sin is the perfect aversion of his holy will and nature to all sin, as contrary to himself. This aversion is without any perturbation in God, such as useth to be in us when we hate any thing; and is nothing else but the holy will and nature of God averse to sin. This aversion is his very nature. The effect thereof is, his pursuing, punishing, destroying, and abolishing sin, and such other things as hatred in us prompts us to.

From what is said, these things are evident concerning God's hatred of sin. 1. God cannot but hate sin. It is his very nature. He *cannot look on iniquity* (g). He cannot but have an utter aversion to it, as contrary to his nature and will. If he did not hate sin, he must needs hate himself, and be an enemy to his own nature. His hatred of sin is essential to him, and necessary; not by a brutish necessity, such as is in brute creatures, who avoid, by a natural instinct, what is disagreeable to their natures; but by a free necessity, arising from the perfect knowledge he hath of the malignity of sin, and the contrariety of it to his being, to his nature, and to all his glorious perfections. 2. God hates sin most vehemently

(c) Rom. viii. 7. (d) Jer. xlv. 4. Psal. v. 4. (e) Psal. xlv. 7. (f) Hab. i. 13. (g) Hab. i. 13.

mently and intensely; with a perfect and infinite hatred. His aversion to and abhorrence of sin is inexpressible and inconceivable. Our hatred of any thing is proportioned to these apprehensions we have of evil in it: But God hath a perfect knowledge of the evil of sin, and hence ariseth an abhorrence of it suitable to that knowledge. The vehemency of God's hatred of sin is emphatically expressed in scripture. He is said *to hate polluted sinners and services with his soul*; which expression hath a great emphasis in it. And it is said, that he *cannot look on iniquity* (b). He so abhors sin that he is impatient of beholding it. And sin is called *that abominable thing which he hateth* (i). His hatred of sin is the aversion of his holy nature to sin, or his holy nature averse to it; therefore his nature being infinite, his hatred must be so too. 3. God hates all sin, in whomsoever he sees it. He cannot hate it in one, and allow or indulge it in another: he *hates all the workers of iniquity* (k). It is sin as sin, and as it is contrary to his nature, that is the object of his hatred, and not sin as it is in this or that person: Therefore, how great soever the person be, and how dear soever he be to God, yet all his sins are hateful to him. He can no more love sin in his own people, than in the worst of men. Though he love the persons of believers for Christ's sake, yet he hates and abhors all their sins. 4. God hates nothing but sin, primarily. Therefore he forbids nothing but sin, and all his judgments are threatened only against sin, and sin is the only procuring cause of the execution of them. It is true, he hates the persons of wicked men: But he doth not hate them as men or creatures simply, but as sinful creatures; creatures defiled and polluted with sin. He hates them for sin; and for nothing else but sin. He never yet hated any man for all the troubles and afflictions that lay upon him, but only for sin: So that sin is the only primary object of his detestation.

Third, I come in the next place to shew, that there is none holy but God, or that he is matchless and incomparable in his holiness. *There is none holy as the Lord: For there is none beside thee.* There is none holy like him; therefore there is none holy besides him. It is a part of the song of the redeemed, *Thou only art holy* (l). Holiness is the peculiar glory of his nature. May we not, with Moses, make a challenge, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods! Who is like thee,*

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I i

glorious

(b) Psal. xi. 5. Isa. i. 14. Hab. i. 13. (i) Jer. xlv. 4.
(k) Psal. v. 5. (l) Rev. xv. 4.

glorious in holiness (m). What man or angel is comparable to him in holiness? Hence he is often stiled *the Holy One*, by way of eminency and excellency. This title is too big for any but God. The highest created purity is but impurity and uncleanness, in comparison of the holiness of God. *Behold he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight (n).* The heavens; that is, angels that inhabit heaven: Though they are pure from corruption, yet not from imperfection. Their holiness is but a weak shadow of the divine purity. The light of God's holiness is so glorious, that it makes the holy *seraphims cover their faces (o)*, out of weakness to behold it; and *cover their feet*, as being ashamed of themselves when they look on the holiness of God. God is *the holy of holies (p)*, as the word may be rendered: As the highest heaven is called *the heaven of heavens*, because it contains all the other heavens within its circle; so God is *the holy of holies*, as he contains in himself the holiness of all creatures put together.

Particularly, there is none holy as the Lord, because, 1. He is necessarily holy. He is as necessarily holy as he is necessarily God. Not only he *will not*, but *cannot look on iniquity (q)*. His holiness is not only an act of his will, but belongeth to his nature. What is moral and good in its own nature is necessarily willed by him; so that he cannot choose to do any thing that is evil. His will is his rule, and his essence is his law; therefore his actions are necessarily holy. But though he be necessarily holy, yet he is not so by a simple necessity, as the sun shines, and the fire burns; but by a free necessity. He is not compelled to it, but inclined from the infinite perfection of his own nature*.

2. He is essentially holy. He is holy by his essence. Holiness is the essential glory of his nature. The essence of many angels continues, though their holiness is lost: And though man lost his original holiness, yet he still retains the essence of a man. But God's holiness is essential to his nature, and inseparable from it. Yea, it is his very essence. It is but a quality and accident in the creature; but it is the substance of God. He is not only holy, but *holiness*. Therefore, as he is

(m) Exod. xv. 11. (n) Job xv. 15. (o) Isa. vi. 2.
(p) Dan. ix. 24. (q) Hab. i. 13.

* *Necesse est ei eadem placere, cui nisi optima placere non possunt: Nec ob hoc minus liber ac potens est, ipse enim est necessitas sua.*

Sen. Nat. Quest. 1. Præf.

is said to swear by *himself*; so he is said to swear by *his holiness*. His holiness is himself. His essence and holiness are the same (*r*).

3. He is perfectly and infinitely holy: Holy in the highest degree*; holy without measure; holy above all measure. The best on earth are but holy in part; there is a mixture of sin in them. And though angels and glorified saints are made perfect in holiness; yet they are not absolutely perfect: though they are perfectly holy in their kind; yet their holiness is but finite and limited; they do not love God so much as he might be loved. But God's holiness is absolutely perfect, and infinite: We cannot set bounds and limits to it, saying, he is so holy and no more: His holiness is unbounded.

4. He is universally holy. He is holy, 1. In his name. So says Mary, in her song, *Holy is his name* (*s*). 2. In his nature. His essence is pure and holy; yea, his essence is purity, or, he is essential purity. 3. In his word. These are frequent adjuncts of it in scripture, *holy, pure, clean* (*t*). 4. In his works. He is holy in all his decrees and administrations. Nothing is decreed by him, nothing is acted him, but what is becoming his holiness. It is the life of all his decrees, and the brightness of all his actions. There is not the least imaginable stain on any thing he hath done. None of his actions can disagree with his nature. Particularly, he is holy, (*1*). In his dispensations of mercy. Therefore when God appears in a covenant garb, with a rainbow about his throne, his holiness is celebrated with praise by the four beasts about the throne; to shew that all his acts of mercy are free from any stain (*u*). (*2*.) In his dispensations of judgment; yea, in the most terrible judgments. When God appeared to Ezekiel, *from his loins even downward*, there was *as the appearance of fire* (*x*), to signify his wrath against the house of Judah: But at the same time, *from his loins even upward*, there was *as the appearance of brightness, or the colour of amber*; to shew that he is holy in the most fiery appearance. The fire wherewith he burns his enemies is a most pure flame. Therefore, when God had ruined the Egyptian army in the Red-Sea, Moses, as it were in an extasy, breaks out into a triumphant expression of the divine

(*r*) Isa. lxiii. 15. and xlv. 23. Psal. lxxxix. 35. Amos iv. 2.

* *Superpurissimus*, says one.

(*s*) Luke i. 49. (*t*) 2 Tim. iii. 15. Psal. cxix. 140. Psal. xix. 9. (*u*) Rev. iv. 8. comp. with verse 3, 5. (*x*) Ezek. viii. 2.

divine holiness: *The sea covered them, says he; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.* Then it follows: *Who is like thee, glorious in holiness (y)!* (3.) He is holy in his providence about sinful actions. Though he permit, limit, order, and overrule, many unholy persons and actions; yet in all he acts like himself. His holiness is not defiled or stained by the impurity of any instruments he useth.

5. He is originally holy. Others are made holy; but he is holy of himself; he hath not his holiness from any other. Again, others are made holy by derivation from him; he is the original spring of all holiness in the creatures. *He is the Lord that sanctifies us.* The holiness of men and angels is but a ray from the Father of lights: It is a participation of the divine stature (z). It is by the influence of God that any of us are holy. Nothing can frame the heart to holiness but the finger of God.

6. He is exemplarily holy: The example and pattern of all holiness in the creature. The holiness of men and angels is but a conformity to the pattern: But the holiness of God is not framed or fashioned according to a rule or pattern, but itself is the pattern. God did not take angels for his pattern in framing man, but his own holiness. He made man *after his image*; and that *in holiness and righteousness (a).* Therefore, this is the perfection always set out as the pattern of our actions. Hence the apostle exhorts, *As he who hath called you is holy; so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy (b).*

7. He is unchangeably holy. The best on earth may change to the worse, may grow less holy; and it is their duty to change to the better, to grow more holy, to go on to further degrees of holiness, till they come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (c). But God is immutable in his holiness: He cannot grow more holy than he is, because he is infinitely holy; nor less holy, because then he would cease to be God. The blessed angels, though holy, yet are changeable in their own nature; their standing is due only to grace. Hence it is said, *He chargeth his angels with folly (d).* The angelical nature, though it be pure, yet hath some kind of folly in it, because it is mutable. But the holiness of God cannot be dimmed or diminished.

He

(y) Exod. xv. 10, 11.

(z) Lev. xx. 8. 2 Pet. i. 4.

(a) Gen. i. 26. Eph. iv. 24.

(b) 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

(c) Eph.

iv. 13.

(d) Job iv. 18.

He is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (e). He is ever equally, yea infinitely holy.

Fourth, I proceed to shew wherein the holiness of God is manifested and discovered. It is manifest, 1. In his word. 2. In his works.

1. In his word. Hence it is called holy; *the holy scriptures (f)*. And it is said to be *pure (g)*, and *very pure (h)*. Particularly, the holiness of God is discovered, 1. In the law. 2. In the gospel.

(1.) In the law. All the legal sacrifices, washings, purifications, and sprinklings, were designed to express what an evil sin is, and how hateful and abominable to God. But the holiness of God is most remarkably expressed in the moral law. Hence the law is said to be holy. It is a transcript of the divine holiness. *The law is holy.* 1. In its precepts. *The commandment is holy (k)*. It requires exact and universal holiness, in the whole man, in every faculty of the soul, and in every member of the body; and this at all times, in all places, in all companies, in all conditions of life, and in every relation wherein we stand, *in all manner of conversation (l)*, in every creek and turning of our lives. 2. In its prohibitions. It prohibits and condemns all impurity and filthiness. It forbids what is evil, and all that is evil, and only what is evil, and that at all times. It discharges, not only sinful words and actions, but all sinful thoughts and motions of the heart. 3. In its threatenings. These are declarations of the divine holiness. His pure and holy nature is so averse to all sin, that he thunders against it in a terrible manner. The word puts all sin to the sword, and strikes through the loins of sinners great and small. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (m)*. We read of a worm that never dies, of a pit without a bottom, of a fire that shall never be quenched, and of torments without end and ease.

(2.) In the gospel. It was designed to set forth God's infinite holiness and hatred of sin, and to recover lost elect sinners to their primitive purity and holiness. The gospel-covenant is called a *holy covenant (n)*. And the promises of the gospel are *holy promises (o)*. They are designed to promote and

(e) James i. 17. (f) Rom. i. 2. 2 Tim. iii. 15. (g) Prov. xxx. 5. (h) Psal. cxix. 140. (i) Rom. vii. 12. (k) Rom. vii. 12. (l) 1 Pet. i. 15. (m) Rom. i. 18. (n) Dan. xi. 28, 30. (o) Psal. cv. 42.

and encourage true holiness. So the apostle would have us to improve them: *Having therefore these promises, says he, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (p).* By them we are made partakers of the divine nature (q). They are declarations of God's infinite love to, and delight in holiness; and are designed to excite our love to it, and to allure us to the study and practice of it. And all the promises are so warily laid down, that no impure or unholy person can lay claim to any of them.

S E R M O N XXX.

2. **I**N his works. He is *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works (a)*. Particularly, the divine holiness is manifest,

(1.) In the creation of man. *God made man upright (b)*. He made him *after his image*; not only as he was a rational, but as he was a holy creature (c): For the image of God in man consists chiefly in this; therefore the *new man* is said to be *created after God in righteousness and true holiness (d)*.

(2.) In his works of providence. As, 1. In the manifestations of his mercy, favour, and kindness to his people, who have a stamp of his holiness upon them. Hereby he manifests his love to and delight in holiness and holy persons. Therefore, when the psalmist blesses God for all his benefits, he takes particular notice of this divine perfection. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, says he, and all that is within me, bless his holy name (e)*. Intimating that God had manifested his holiness in his kind and merciful dealings with him. Particularly, God's giving gracious returns and answers to the prayers of his people is a fruit of his holiness. Therefore, when the psalmist had declared him to be *holy in all his works*, he gives this particular instance, *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him (f)*. And Hannah, having had a favourable return to her prayer, celebrates this divine perfection in my text, *There is none holy as the Lord*. Again, the holiness of God is manifest in delivering his people in trouble and danger, and in avenging wrongs done to them. Therefore, when God had delivered his people, and destroyed their enemies in the Red-Sea, Moses praises his holiness: *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness (g)*!

In

(p) 2 Cor. vii. 1. (q) 2 Pet. i. 4.

(a) Psal. cxlv. 17.

(b) Eccl. vii. 29.

(c) Gen. i. 26.

(d) Eph. iv. 24.

(e) Psal. ciii. 1.

(f) Psal. cxlv. 17, 18.

(g) Exod. xv. 11.

In a word, all God's acts of love, mercy, and kindness to his people, are manifestations of his holiness. Hence it is a part of Mary's Song: *He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name (h)*. 2. In his dreadful executions of judgment for sin. All the judgments showered down upon the heads of sinners, spring from God's holiness and hatred of sin. All the dreadful storms and tempests in the world, are blown up by it. All diseases, wars, pestilences, famines, are designed to vindicate God's holiness and hatred of sin. Therefore, when God had smitten the two sons of Aaron for offering strange fire, he says, *I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified (i)*. He glorified himself, in declaring, by that act, before all the people, that he is a holy God, that cannot endure sin and disobedience. More particularly, God's holiness and hatred of sin is manifest, (1.) In punishing the angels that sinned, without remedy. God spared them not, but cast them down to hell (k). Though they were the noblest part of the universe, glorious creatures, the favourites and courtiers of heaven; yet, when they sinned, God would not spare them. O, how hateful must sin be to God, when, for one sin, these princes of creation were presently cast down to hell, without so much as a thought of mercy for any one of them? For they are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day (l). (2.) In the punishments threatened and inflicted on man for his first apostacy. Man, in his first state, was God's great favourite; God made the world for his use and service, made him after his own image, set him in paradise, subjected the creatures to him, made him lord of the creation, admitted him to fellowship and communion with him; yet he no sooner sinned, but God stript him of his glory and excellency, thrust him out of paradise, banished him from his presence, debarred him from communion with him, and sentenced him and all his posterity to misery, death, and ruin. O the infinite and spotless purity and holiness of God! (3.) In executing terrible and strange judgments upon sinners. It was for sin that God brought a deluge of water upon the old world, and rained fire and brimstone out of heaven upon Sodom, and made the earth open her mouth and swallow up Dathan and Abiram and their company; and it was for sin that he brought terrible destroying judgments on Jerusalem. O how hateful must sin be to God! (4.) In wrapping up and involving every thing belong-

(h) Luke i. 49. (i) Lev. x. 3. (k) 2 Pet. 2. 4. (l) Jude 6.

† *Pluit gehennam e. Caela.* Salyian. Lib. de provid.

ing to sinners in the same judgment with themselves. The very ground was cursed for man's sake. And not only Achan himself, but his children, and cattle, and all that he had, were burnt and destroyed together with himself (m). And, in the destruction of Sodom, not only the grown sinners, but their infants, their cattle, and all that they had, were destroyed by fire from heaven. O how detestable is sin unto God, and how contrary to his nature! *He turns a fruitful land into barrenness, for the sins of them that dwell therein* (n). (5.) In punishing sins seemingly small with great judgments. A multitude of angels, for one aspiring thought, as some think, were thrust down to hell. Uzzah, a good man, was struck dead for touching the ark. Yea, fifty thousand of the Bethshemites were smitten dead for but looking into the ark. We are apt to entertain slight thoughts of many sins; but God hath set forth some as examples of his hatred and abhorrence of sins seemingly small, for a warning to others, and a demonstration of his exact holiness. (6.) In bringing heavy afflictions upon his own people for sin. Even the sins of believers in Christ do sometimes cost them dear here in this world. Though they are exempted from everlasting torments in hell, yet they are not spared from the furnace of affliction here on earth. We have instances of this in David, Solomon, Jonah, and other saints. Yea, sometimes, in this life, God punisheth sin more severely in his own people than in other men. Moses, for but *speaking unadvisedly with his lips* (o), was excluded from Canaan, though many greater sinners were suffered to enter in. Such severity toward his own people, is a plain demonstration, that he hates sin as sin, and not because the worst men commit it. (7.) In the horrors and terrors of awakened consciences for sin. O how insupportable are they! *A wounded spirit who can bear* (p)? When God arms the sinner's own thoughts against him, and makes a guilty conscience pursue him, O what horrible fears are there of the wrath and vengeance of God! Even *a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation* (q). Who can conceive or express what the sinner then feels in his own bosom? O, how hateful and detestable must that be to God, for which he makes a man a Magor-missabib, fear round about, so that wherever he goes, he carries a hell in his bosom! (8.) In sentencing so many millions of Adam's posterity to everlasting

(m) Gen. iii. 17. Josh. vii. 24, 25. (n) Psal. cvii. 34.
 (o) Psal. cvi. 33. (p) Prov. xviii. 14. (q) Heb. x. 27.

ing torments for sin. That an infinitely good God, who is Goodness itself, and delights in mercy, should adjudge so many of his own creatures to the everlasting pains and torments of hell: Certainly this must be for something infinitely detested and abhorred by him.

(3.) In our redemption by the death and sufferings of Christ. And, first, In our redemption by Christ, it appears what a love God hath to holiness, and what a value he puts upon a stamp and impress of his holiness in the creature, seeing he did so much for the recovery thereof when it was lost. He hath been at vast expence about this. He sent his only begotten Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, to be a rare pattern of holiness, yea, to bleed and die upon a cross, and to suffer divine wrath, that it might be revived in the souls of men. O what a high delight and pleasure must he take in holiness, when he hath been at such vast expence to have it recovered in an elect company! Second, In our redemption by Christ God's hatred of sin is most conspicuous. All the demonstrations that ever God gave of his hatred of sin, were nothing in comparison of this. Neither all the vials of judgment that God hath poured out in the world, nor the roarings of the damned in hell, nor the irreverfible sentence pronounced against the fallen angels, do afford such a demonstration of the divine holiness and hatred of sin, as the death and sufferings of Christ. Consider, 1. The infinite worth and dignity of his person. Though he was *God over all, blessed for ever*; though he was *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person* (r); yet he must become a curse, and bleed to death for sin. Did ever sin appear so hateful to God as here? To demonstrate God's infinite holiness and hatred of sin, he would have the most glorious and excellent person in heaven and earth to suffer for it. 2. Consider how dear he was to the Father. He was his *only begotten Son*, his *well beloved Son*, *who lay in his bosom*, as dear to God as himself, and the object of his delight from everlasting (s). Yet as dear as he was to God, he would not and could not spare him when he stood charged with our sins (t). 3. Consider the greatness of his sufferings. What he suffered in his body was very grievous. His back was mangled with stripes, his head pricked with thorns, his body nailed to the cross, his side pierced with a spear; his death was a bloody, painful, shameful, and cursed death.

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K k

(r) Rom. ix. 5. Heb. i. 3. (s) John i. 18. Col. i. 13. Prov. viii. 30. (t) Rom. viii. 32.

death. But what was all this to what he suffered in his soul? O the agonies of his soul under the wrath of God due to sin! It was so hateful to God, that nothing could expiate it, or satisfy for it, but the death and soul-agonies of his own dear Son. 4. Consider the cause of his sufferings: Not any sin of his own, for he had none, being *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners* (u). He was made sin only by a voluntary imputation, by taking our sins upon him. Though they were only imputed to him, yet God would not spare him. So that in nothing is the divine holiness and hatred of sin so manifest, as in the sufferings of his own dear Son. This was a greater demonstration thereof, than if all men and angels had suffered eternally for sin in hell-fire.

(4.) In the application of Christ's purchased redemption. We must be effectually called, justified, and sanctified: In all which God hath displayed and manifested the holiness of his nature. His holiness is manifest, 1. In our effectual calling. In the day of his power upon the heart, he appears in the *beauties of holiness* (x). So much is intimated in that expression, *He who hath called you is holy*. Believers are called to be saints, and called unto holiness. Hence their calling is said to be an *holy calling* (y). 2. In our justification. For we are justified before God, not on the account of any righteousness of our own, but on the account of the righteousness of Christ. This manifests the infinite purity and holiness of the divine nature. We can find no acceptance with God on the account of our own righteousness, because it is imperfect, and stained and polluted with sin. There must be a perfect and unspotted righteousness to suit the holiness of God; and only the righteousness of Christ is such. Hence the saints deprecate God's entering into judgment with them. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant: For in thy sight shall no man living be justified* (z), viz. By his own righteousness. There must be a righteousness that may endure the eyes of his holiness. *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God* (a)! Such guilty sinners as we are, cannot stand before him but in the perfect righteousness of a Mediator. Again, we are justified by faith, to wit, mediately and instrumentally: It is by faith we lay hold on Christ and his righteousness. Herein is the divine purity and holiness manifest, that he hath chosen faith to this office, a grace that *purifies the heart, and works by love* (b). 3.

In

(u) Heb. vii. 26. (x) Psal. cx. 3. (y) 1 Pet. i. 15. Rom. i. 7. 1 Cor. i. 2. 1 Thess. iv. 7. 2 Tim. i. 9. (z) Psal. cxliii. 2.

(a) 1 Sam. vi. 20. (b) Acts xv. 9. Gal. v. 6.

In our sanctification. There is not only a relative, but a real change, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature, and renewed after the image of God (c). And if we be renewed according to his image, it must be according to his holiness: For the new man is created after God (that is, after the image of God) in righteousness and true holiness (d). So that our sanctification is a beam from the holiness of God. He therein stamps his image, his holiness upon us. The law in the heart is an extract of his holiness. Therefore our Lord addresses himself to the Father under the title of Holy Father, for the sanctification of his people: *Holy Father, sanctify them through thy truth* (e). This is the proper fountain whence our holiness springs.

Fifthly, Follows the application of this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction, in divers particulars.

Instr. 1. We may hence be instructed about the great evil of sin. It is against the divine holiness; so that it is not only contrary to our interests, but to the very nature of God. All sin aims in general at the being of God, but especially at the holiness of his being. Some sins are more directly against one divine perfection, and some against another; but all sins agree together in their enmity against the holiness of God, which is the peculiar glory of the Deity. Hence, when Sennacherib's sin is aggravated, the Holy Spirit takes the rise from this perfection: *Against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the holy One of Israel* (f). And God cannot but hate that which is directly opposite to the glory of his nature, and the lustre and varnish of all his other perfections. Now, what a horrid evil must that be, that is so contrary to the nature of God, that it is infinitely detested and abhorred by him! Oh, how little of the evil of sin is seen or understood even by the best of men!

Instr. 2. We may hence discover the great excellency of true gospel holiness. Holiness is the glory and beauty of God; therefore it must be the glory of men and women, that which makes them truly glorious. In this respect, the King's daughter is said to be *all glorious within* (g). It is the glory of all the Lord's people, that they are a *holy people*. The church is glorious, because she is holy. Christ *sanctifies and cleanses it, that he may present it to himself a glorious church* (h). This is the

(c) 2 Pet. i. 4. Col. iii. 10.

(d) Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10.

(e) John xvii. 11, 17.

(f) 2 Kings xix. 22.

(g) Psal. xlv. 13.

(h) Eph. v. 26, 27.

the image of God in the rational creature. The more holy, the more like God. This is our chief excellency Likeness to God in holiness was man's original glory and happiness; and wherein lies the excellency of angels above devils, but in their holiness? Holiness hath a self-evidencing excellency in it. There is such a beauty and majesty in it, as commands an acknowledgment of it from the consciences of all sorts of knowing men. Your true honour before God lies not in the outward pomp and splendor of your condition, but in true holiness.

Instr. 3. It follows from this doctrine, that God cannot be the author of sin. As it were horrid blasphemy once to imagine him to be the author of it; so it cannot be conceived how he should be the author of that which is contrary to his own holiness, and is infinitely detested and abhorred by him. He cannot be the author of sin, 1. By giving any encouragement to it: For how can he encourage any to that, which he cannot look upon without an infinite detestation? Nor, 2. By inclining the heart to the practice of it: For how can he incline men to that which is so contrary to himself, and which the excellency of his own nature obliges him eternally to abhor. Nor, 3. By enticing or soliciting men to the practice of it: For though God sometimes tempt men, by way of trial, to try their obedience, as he did Abraham; yet he *tempteth no man, by way of seduction (i)*. So that God cannot be the author of sin. We may sooner imagine that darkness shall be the offspring of a sun-beam, than that a holy God can be the author of that which is contrary to his nature. The apostle abominates any such thought: *Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. He is a God of truth, and without iniquity (k)*. Men are evil only by their own fault. The corruption of our own natures is that which principally inclines us to evil. So the apostle tells us, *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed (l)*. Sin knows no mother but our own hearts. The root is in ourselves.

True it is, God hath a providence in and about sinful actions, else they could never be committed; for *in him we live, and move, and have our being (m)*. If he did not uphold us in being and working, we could do nothing. Yet he cannot be conceived to be the author or proper cause of the obliquity that is in sinful actions. His providence is conversant about

sin,

(i) Gen. xxii. 1. James i. 13. (k) Rom. ix. 14. Deut. xxxii. 4.
(l) James i. 14. (m) Acts xvii. 28.

sin, without sin. The bare action, considered as such, is from God; but the obliquity or deordination of that action is from the sinner himself. And although a holy and just God doth sometimes try men with such providences, objects, and occasions, as prove a snare unto them; yet these providences and objects are in themselves good, and prove a snare to sinners only through their own corruption.

S E R M O N XXXI.

BUT here occurs a considerable difficulty. If sin be so contrary to the holiness of God, that it is infinitely detested and abhorred by him, why then doth he permit sin? What I have to say, in answer to this, shall be under these three heads.

1. It is certain that God doth permit sin. The apostle plainly tells us, that God, *in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own ways* (a). If he did not permit sin, then it had never been, nor could it be committed by any creature; unless we suppose the creature to be more powerful than God, which were blasphemous. God could have prevented the revolt of angels, and the fall of man, if he had pleased. It is then plain and evident that God doth permit sin. And his permitting it is not a naked permission, but such as is attended with the certainty of the event; seeing the execution of God's decree, about the salvation of some lost sinners, through a Mediator, depended upon it.

2. Yet there is no inconsistency between God's holiness or hatred of sin, and his permission of it. 1. Because it is not a moral permission, allowing men to sin, if they please. Indeed this had been an indulgence to sin, and so had made it lawful or indifferent: And consequently such a moral permission had been a blot upon the holiness of God. 2. God's permitting sin is not so much an action of God, as a suspension of his influence, and the not exerting that efficacy which might have hindered sin, as appears from what the Lord says to Abimelech concerning Sarah, *I withheld thee from sinning against me; therefore suffered I thee not to touch her* (b). So that God's permitting sin is nothing else but his not withholding men from sin, or his denying them that help and grace which would certainly have prevented it. But then, 3. Consider, God was under no obligation to prevent the commission of sin. Indeed, our forbearing to do that which may

(a) Acts xiv. 16. (b) Gen. xx. 6.

may prevent sin, brings us under guilt; because we are under an obligation to prevent it. But God was not bound. He was under no law. His supreme and absolute dominion and sovereignty exempts him from any such obligation. He is debtor to none. His help and grace is his own, to give or withhold it at his pleasure. Nothing in the nature of God could oblige him to hinder the entrance of sin into the world: Especially considering, 4. That God doth not permit sin as sin, or barely for itself, but for a greater good, even his own glory: For he knows how to bring good out of so great an evil, as well as light out of darkness. Indeed, it cannot be imagined that an infinitely holy God should permit sin, but for some great and glorious end. Upon these grounds, I say there is no inconsistency between God's infinite hatred of sin, and his permission of it *.

3. God did permit sin, that he might have occasion of giving the greater demonstration of his holiness and hatred of sin, both in sinners themselves, and in Christ the blessed surety of elect sinners. If God had not permitted sin, there had been no occasion of manifesting his hatred of it, neither by dreadful executions of judgment on sinners, in this life and in the life to come, nor by the death and sufferings of his own dear Son. And yet, in the death and sufferings of Christ, we have a far greater manifestation of God's holiness and hatred of sin, than his preventing it could be.

Instr. 4. It follows from this doctrine that God cannot but punish sin. His infinite holiness and hatred of sin doth necessarily infer the punishment of it. It is as much contrary to his nature not to punish sin, as it is contrary to his nature not to hate it; So that there is an inseparable connection between God's hating the sin and punishing the sinner that lives and goes on in it. Hence the psalmist infers God's punishing sinners from his hatred of them: *But the wicked, says he, and him that loveth violence his soul hateth*: And then it follows: *Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest* (c). It is true, God in punishing sin, is to be considered as a rational agent, acting rationally and wisely; and so he sometimes exerts his patience, in forbearing punishment

* *Nec dubitandum est Deum facere bene, etiam sinendo fieri quæcunque male*—*Nam nisi esset hoc bonum, ut essent & mala, nullo modo esse sinerentur ab omnipotente bono.*

Aug. Enchirid. Cap. 96.

(c) Psal. xi. 5, 6.

ment for a time, for holy and wise ends: Yet such is God's hatred of sin, that he must needs punish it, sooner or later. We could not certainly know how hateful sin is to God, if he did not manifest his hatred of it; and his hatred of sin could not be manifested without punishing it. Threatenings would be but vain affrightments, if never put in execution. Seeing sin is so contrary to the nature of God, he would violate his own nature, and seem to be out of love with his glory, if he did not punish it. Again, seeing God is so holy that he cannot but hate sin, therefore he cannot but debar such as live in it from communion with him; and that is the greatest of all punishments: This will be further clear from what follows.

Instr. 5. It follows from this doctrine, that God can have no gracious communion with unholy sinners. For, *what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness, &c (d).* How is it possible that an infinitely holy God should embrace impure sinners that are not washed from their filthiness? How can there be any delightful communion between them that are of contrary natures? God will not give impure sinners one good look: For he is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity (e).* Likeness is the ground of communion: But what likeness is there between an infinitely holy God and a polluted creature? But more to this purpose afterward.

Instr. 6. From this doctrine it appears that there is no coming to God without a mediator. *Our God is a consuming fire (f),* and we are, by reason of sin, as stubble full dry; he is infinitely holy, and we are vile polluted creatures: So that we can have no access to him, or communion with him, on our own account. *O, Who can stand before this holy Lord God (g)!* There is no standing before him without a mediator. The spots and blemishes in our best duties cannot be hid from the eyes of his holiness. He cannot accept of a righteousness lower than that which bears some suitableness to the holiness of his nature: But even our highest obedience and best righteousness doth not, in any degree, suit the divine holiness; therefore it cannot challenge any acceptance with God. The righteousness of Christ being the righteousness of God, a perfect and unspotted righteousness, is that alone wherein the holiness of God can acquiesce.

Instr. 7. Is God infinitely and necessarily holy, so that he cannot

(d) 2 Cor. vi. 14.
(g) 1 Sam. vi. 20.

(e) Hab. i. 13.

(f) Heb. xii. 29.

cannot but hate sin? Then how admirable is the patience of God toward this land, and the generation wherein we live! His patience will appear wonderful, if we consider these two things.

1. Consider how much sin aboundeth. Alas, all kinds of sin abound amongst all ranks and degrees of persons: And sins of a hainous nature; such sins as bid God a defiance. O what contempt of God? What blasphemies of him? What reproaches of his majesty? Such abominations abound as dare God to his face; scarlet and crimson sins, double-dyed abominations. What horrid blasphemies, hideous oaths, vile adulteries, cruel oppressions, contempt of religion, and gross profanation of the Lord's Day? And add to all these, the ingratitude, pride, and worldliness, of such as are more eminent for a profession of religion. And all these are committed under a clear gospel-light, after signal mercies and deliverances, against the most solemn covenant-engagements, personal and national, and against manifold rebukes and warnings from the word and providences of God. And, alas, how much are these sins multiplied? Who can compute the number of sins one profane wretch is guilty of? But what are these to the sins of a whole city? And what are the sins of a whole city to the sins of the whole nation? Who can compute the number of sins that Scotland is guilty of in one day? But what are these to the sins that have been committed for a great many years past? Oh, we are a people loaded with iniquity.

2. Consider God's infinite holiness and hatred of our sins. He hates them as being contrary to his nature, to his holiness; and he hates them with a perfect and infinite hatred. Yea, he hates our sins, as what invade him in all his attributes. He hates them infinitely more than all the men on earth and all the angels and saints in heaven can do. He is *pressed under us, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves (b)*. Yet he hath for many years forbore the execution of deserved wrath. O what matter of admiration is here! His holiness renders his patience the more astonishing. O the riches of his forbearance toward us! Admire it, and adore it, and bless and praise God for it; and take heed of abusing it, by taking liberty to go on in sin because of it. Such an astonishing patience, if abused, will render our judgment very severe.

Use 2. For reproof. To such as injure or wrong the holiness of God. This is done, 1. Doctrinally. 2. Practically.

First,

(b) Amos ii. 13.

First, Doctrinally. The holiness of God is injured,

1. By the opinion of venial sins. The papists distinguish sins into venial and mortal sins. By mortal sins, they understand such sins as deserve eternal death. But venial sins, say they, are a lighter sort of sins, that do in their own nature rather deserve a pardon than punishment; or if they be punished, yet they hold that they do not deserve eternal, but only temporal punishment. But it argues very mean thoughts of God, and a great contempt of his holiness, not to look on the least sin against him as infinitely heinous. And that distinction of venial and mortal sins is contrary to scripture. The apostle tells us, *The wages of sin is death (i)*. He says not, *the wages* of this, or that, or the other sin, but *of sin*, indefinitely; that is, of *all sin*, of every thing that hath the nature of sin, *is death*; that is, eternal death, as is clear from the opposite clause of the verse, *But the gift of God is eternal life*.

2. By ascribing merit to good works. The papists plead that the good works of believers are meritorious of eternal life. Herein they imitate the corrupt Jews of old, who mingled an opinion of merit with their sacrifices, as though they did by these make a sufficient compensation to that infinite holiness they had offended. But such an opinion argues very corrupt and unworthy notions of the holiness of God. Our best works are so imperfect, so stained and polluted with sin, that the eye of God's holiness cannot look on them, considered in themselves; so that nothing we do could be accepted, were it not for the blessed Mediator. To think that our polluted duties can so suit the holiness of his nature, as that on the account of them we can obtain eternal life, is to vilify, yea, blaspheme the holiness of God.

3. By certain blasphemous titles given to the pope. He is stiled by those of the Romish church, *most holy*, and *his holiness*. And the pope doth proudly arrogate these titles to himself. But it is God's peculiar excellency, that he is superlatively holy; holy beyond all compare, and essentially holy; so that these titles, *most holy*, and *his holiness*, are proper to him alone, and therefore cannot, without blasphemy, be given to any creature. And the pope, by arrogating such titles to himself, doth plainly shew that he is that antichrist, who *exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped*; so that he, as God, *sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (k)*. When such titles

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L 1

as

(i) Rom. vi. 23.

(k) 2 Thess. ii. 4.

as are proper to the divine holiness, are attributed to poor vile contemptible creatures, yea, to profane and wicked creatures, such as many of the popes have been; this is to disgrace the holiness of God, and to pour contempt upon it.

Second, Practically, the holiness of God is injured or wronged, even by too many professed protestants; and that divers ways.

1. By mens' entertaining base and unworthy imaginations of God, as if he approved of their wicked and sinful course. Men are naturally apt to frame in their imagination, a God that winks or smiles at their abominations, and to think him such an one as themselves are. God chargeth the wicked with this, *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself (l)*.

The causes of this may be, 1. Misinterpreting divine patience. When God *keeps silence*, and endures sinners with much long-suffering, they take occasion from this to *think that he is such an one as themselves (m)*. They transform God into an idol after their own fancy. Though God threaten them for sin, yet they imagine that he doth it only to fright them. They interpret his patience as if it were a consent to their crimes, as if he did thereby grant an indemnity and indulgence to sin. 2. Natural atheism. Men naturally contemn all sense of a Deity, and would raze all conscience and reverence of God out of their hearts. So the psalmist tells us, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God (n)*. This root of natural atheism springs up in foolish imaginations and conceits of God. 3. Love to sin. This is deeply rooted in our natures. Men naturally affect a liberty to sin, and therefore are apt to entertain such conceits of God as may encourage them in it. They are naturally prone to conceive of God, not as he is, but as they would have him to be.

But to entertain such unworthy imaginations of God is a woful evil. For, 1. It is a vilifying and debasing his majesty. It is a stamping the devil's image upon him; an ascribing such qualities to him as would be a disgrace to any wise or good man. 2. It is worse than idolatry. Gross idolaters, that change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible things, do not sin so hainously, as they do who imagine God to be like one of their sinful selves. Idolaters make him an earthly God, like an earthly creature: But these fancy him to be an impure and unholy God, like a wicked creature. 3. It is worse than absolute atheism or a denial of God. When men imagine that God is not so holy, that

(l) Psal. l. 21.

(m) Psal. l. 21.

(n) Psal. xiv. 1.

that he doth not so hate sin, or that he gives some allowance or indulgence to it; such imaginations are most contrary to the nature of God: And it is not so great an evil to think him *not to be*, as it is to think him such an one as is inconsistent with his nature. As a noble author observes *, "It would be better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion as is unworthy of him: For the one is unbelief, the other is contumely." There is no wise man but would chuse rather to have his memory to perish, than be accounted infamous: So, better to be thought *no God*, than to be thought an *impure* and *unholy God* †. 4. This is the source and spring of all the wickedness that is in the world. God chargeth the impieties of wicked men upon this score, that they *thought him to be altogether such an one as themselves* (o). Men presume upon God as if he were all goodness and mercy, and imagine that God is even like themselves, that he hath as little hatred of sin as they have, and so encourage themselves to live and go on more securely in their own courses.

2. By mens' charging their sins upon God. The apostle James dissuades us from this evil: *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God* (p). Many who will not say so with their mouths, say it in their hearts. They entertain such imaginations. Now, wicked men cast or charge their sins upon God not only more grossly, when they imagine that God tempts or solicits them to sin; but also these ways. 1. By laying the blame on God's providence, in disposing of their condition and circumstances, and tryisting them with such objects and occasions as prove a snare to them. So did Adam, when he was brought to trial immediately after the fall: For thus he pleads, *The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat* (q). As if he had said, If I had been alone, it had been well for me, I had been a happy man still; but thou wouldest give me a woman, and lo, she hath tempted and ruined me. So, many plead their worldly distractions and incumbrances, as an excuse for their neglect of duty; and that God hath brought them into such miseries, wants and distresses, that they are forced to use such and such sinful shifts. But God brings miseries upon men, not to make them worse, but to make them better; at least it is

* Bacon's Essay. 17.

† *Malo de me dici nullum esse Plutarchum, quam malum esse Plutarchum: De Deo male sentire, quam Deum esse negare, pejus duco.*
Plutarch.

(o) Psal. l. 21.

(p) James i. 13.

(q) Gen. iii. 12.

is so in the tendency of the thing : And mens' outward condition, and the objects and occasions they meet with, are in themselves good, and prove snares to them only through the corruption that is in their own hearts. So the apostle tells us, that *corruption is in the world through lust* (r). The cause why men are covetous, sensual, or effeminate, is not in gold, or wine, or women, but in their own corrupt affections. 2. By ascribing their sins to God's not hindering them to sin, and not bestowing grace upon them to prevent it. Some sinners will plead thus, We have all the grace that God hath given us ; if he would give us more grace, we would be better men, and would not live as we do. Solomon tells us, *The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord* (s). Wicked men pervert their way, and draw miseries on themselves by their own folly, and then they fret and repine against God, and quarrel with him, as if he were the cause of their sin and misery. But God is not bound to hinder men to sin, so that his permission of it is not at all faulty. And he is not obliged to give them grace. His grace is his own, and he may do with his own what he pleases. 3. By casting the blame upon God's decree ; of which I may have occasion to speak in its proper place.

S E R M O N XXXII.

BUT it may be enquired, whence is it that wicked men are so apt to charge their sin upon God ? I assign these grounds or causes of it. 1. It ariseth from a natural inclination men have to clear and vindicate themselves. Solomon tells us, *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes* (a). Men would be clear in their own thoughts, and are loth to think basely of themselves and their practices : Hence it is that they seek excuses for their sin, and transfer sin from themselves upon others ; and rather than fail, they shift it over on God himself. 2. They do so, that they may keep their souls secure, and fearless of wrath and punishment. We use not to fear men that are as faulty as ourselves, or are partners with us in sin. So, if wicked men can persuade themselves, that he who is to punish sin is a partner with them in it, this relieves them from many terrors and horrors of conscience. 3. It ariseth from mens' natural enmity against God. Men naturally hate God, are enemies to him and to his glory ; and shew their spite

(r) 2 Pet. i. 4.

(s) Prov. xix. 3.

(a) Prov. xvi. 2.

spite against him, by profaning his glory, and making it seem vile in their own thoughts. Because they cannot raze out the sense of a Deity in their hearts, therefore they would destroy the dread and reverence of it, and for this end depreciate his being, and throw contempt upon his holiness.

But to charge your sin upon God is a very woful evil. It is a debasing the majesty of God, yea, a blaspheming him, as if he could be the author of sin, or a partner with you in it. A greater affront cannot be offered to the infinite holiness of God. It is horrid to conceive God to be a favourer of your iniquity: But it is much more horrid to accuse him as accessory to your guilt or a partner with you in sin.

3. The holiness of God is injured, when men imagine to entice God to give way to their sins, or to prosper them in sin. And men do so divers ways. 1. By addressing God to prosper them in some wicked design. Solomon tells us, that wicked men sometimes *sacrifice with an evil mind (b)*. Sometimes they do it to gain the favour of God to some evil purpose. As when public feasts and prayers are appointed for success in unjust wars: Like Balaam, who caused erect altars, hoping to entice God, by many sacrifices, to curse his own people. 2. By pretences of religion. Sometimes, when wicked men have a wicked design or enterprise in hand, they pretend religion, and take up a profession, and use fasting and prayer, to draw God to a liking of their ways, and allure him to enter upon their secret, and to be of their faction. 3. By praying for mercies and blessings, with a design to make use of them as instruments of sin. The apostle taxeth this, *Ye ask amiss*, says he, *that ye may consume it upon your lusts (c)*. Wicked men will sometimes pray for health and long life, that they may live in sinful pleasures; and for wealth, that they may fare deliciously every day; and for an estate, that they may raise their name and family; and for victory and success, that they may wreak their malice on their enemies.

But it is a great evil for men to think of enticing God to give way to their sins, or to prosper them in sin. For, 1. It is utterly vain. For *God is not tempted to evil (d)*. He is above the reach and power of any temptation. What a foolish thing is it, to imagine that you can engage a God of infinite holiness to favour you in any evil design? Sin cannot have one good look from him (e). 2. It is horridly blasphemous to imagine that an infinitely holy Majesty can espouse unjust practices, or
make

(b) Prov. xxi. 27. (c) James iv. 3. (d) James i. 13. (e) Hab. i. 13.

make iniquity prosperous. 3. It is a great contempt of his holiness. When men address God to prosper them in any wicked design or undertaking, or when they plead with God for mercies with a wicked intention; this implies some lurking imagination that God may be drawn to favour them in their sins. It is, in effect, to desire God to strip himself of his holiness, and to make a breach upon his own nature, that he may gratify their lusts: And this is very horrid.

4. By scoffing at holiness, and deriding such as profess and practise it. Such as have been most conscientious in the study and practice of purity and holiness, have been sometimes branded by many with the name of puritans, and called, in contempt and scorn, Holy Brethren. And, at this day, such as are holy in their lives, are scoffed, derided, and reproached by profane men: And the more holy any are, they are so much the more made the objects of the taunts and scoffs of vile worms. It is the observation of a worthy gentleman *, that amongst the Turks, Jews, Indians, Persians, and the papists themselves, the most zealous and holy, as they conceive them, in their religion, are most esteemed and honoured; and only in the greater part of the protestant churches, the most strict and holy in their lives, are hated, nick-named, disgraced, and vilified.

But this is a hateful evil: For hereby that which is the beauty of heaven is turned into an ignominy on earth; and that which is the glory of angels, yea, the express image of the glorious God, is made the scorn of vile worms. What a contempt is hereby put upon the divine holiness? They that hate and condemn holiness in the creature, hate and condemn the divine holiness much more: For the holiness of God is the original pattern; holiness in the creature is but a beam from that infinite Sun, a stream from that eternal Fountain: Therefore such as scoff at holiness in the creature, do much more condemn the holiness of God. Such as scoff at holiness deride God himself: For holiness is his very nature, and, in the creature, it is his represented image †. God is glorious in holiness; therefore Holy Brethren should be no more a disgrace than Holy Father. How dreadful is it for any man to make that his scorn which is the divine glory? Such are rebels

* Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Primitive Practice for preserving Truth, Sect. 17.

† Ἡ τῆς εἰκόνος τίμη ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτότυπον ἀναδίδωται.

Basil. de Spir. Sancto. C. 10.

bels against God : For when they cannot abuse the holiness of God, they do it in his image : As rebels, who cannot wrong the king in his person, will do it in his picture. They are arrived at the height of wickedness, who *sit in the seat of the scornful* (e).

Use 3. For exhortation. In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Labour to have a deep sense of the holiness of God upon your heart. Get lively and powerful apprehensions of it. This will have many special advantages. For, 1. It will beget humility and self-lothing under the sense of your own vileness. When Isaiah heard the seraphims sound forth the praises of God's holiness, he cried out, *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips* (f). Who can seriously think of the infinite holiness of God, and not lothe themselves ? What vile lothsome creatures are we in his presence ? 2. It will put you out of conceit with your own righteousness. How proud was the Pharisee (g), when he looked on other men that wallowed in their filthiness ? But let a man seriously view the holiness of God, and presently his pride is dashed out of countenance, his holiness appears fordid, and his righteousness matter of shame, and all his excellency a mere senseless shadow. Even the holy angels do not find such a holiness in themselves, that they can appear with their faces and feet uncovered in the presence of God, when they think of his holiness (h). 3. It will raise your esteem of Christ, and commend him to you. For when you think seriously of the holiness of God, you cannot but have such thoughts as these, " O how shall such a vile creature as " I am come into the presence of an infinitely holy Majesty ? " My best duties are polluted with sin ; how shall they ever " be accepted ? How shall I have access to, or communion " with a God of infinite holiness ? What would I do, if there " were not a blessed Mediator to bring me in to God, by mak- " ing up the distance between him and a vile polluted crea- " ture ? " Thus, the sense of God's holiness will greatly commend Christ to you. 4. It will fill you with holy fear and reverence. When you think seriously of the divine holiness, what a holy awe of God will there be upon your heart, especially in duties of worship ? What holy fear of offending ? What a check would it be to sin and temptations ? The more lively and powerful your apprehensions be of the holiness of God, you will be the more ashamed to do any thing which you know to be hateful and abominable in his eyes. Well

(e) Psal. i. 1. (f) Isa. vi. 5. (g) Luke xviii. (h) Isa. vi. 2, 3.

Well then, study the holiness of God. Often contemplate it in the discoveries and manifestations he hath given of it, especially in the death and sufferings of Christ. Meditate upon it deeply and frequently. Study nearness to God: for such as are nearest to him have the deepest sense of his holiness.

Exhort. 2. Honour, adore, and reverence the Majesty of God upon the account of his holiness. The redeemed cry out, under the sense of it, *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy (i).* His holiness renders him venerable; *holy and reverend is his name.* The holy Seraphims cover their faces (k) before him, out of a profound reverence. We fear and reverence holy men: Herod, though a king, feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy (l). And shall we not much more fear and reverence the infinitely holy God, in comparison of whom the holiness of all creatures is a mere shadow? Fear to do any thing that may offend the eyes of his holiness. Stand in awe and sin not (m). By a holy fear we sanctify him. Hence is that expression, *They shall sanctify the holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel (n).* And to this we are exhorted: *Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread (o).* We sanctify him, not by making him more holy than he is, seeing he is infinitely holy; but by declaring him to be holy, and manifesting to others what a deep sense we have of his holiness upon our own hearts.

✓ *Exhort. 3.* Love God for his holiness. True it is, you should love him for his goodness, mercy, patience, and all his other perfections; for these also render him an amiable object: but love him chiefly for his holiness. It is not enough to love him because he is good and gracious to you, but you must love him also because he is holy in himself. It is chiefly his holiness that renders him amiable to himself; Therefore this chiefly should render him lovely to you. Love to him for his holiness and purity is necessary to prove and make out the sincerity of your love. Corrupt nature inclines us the quite contrary way. Unrenewed men hate God especially for his holiness. They have a great aversion from him on the account thereof; and cannot endure any stamp or impress of this divine perfection. They hate his people, because of their holiness; And they cannot be reconciled to his laws, because

(i) Rev. xv. 4. (k) Psal. cxi. 9. Isa. vi. 2. (l) Mark vi. 20.
(m) Psal. iv. 4. (n) Isa. xxix. 23. (o) Isa. viii. 13.

because they are so pure and holy: And they secretly wish in their hearts, that God were not so holy, and that his laws were not so strict, and that he might approve of their way, and not hate their sins. I say then, that wicked men hate God especially for his holiness: Therefore it will be a good evidence of the sincerity of your love, when you love God chiefly because he is a holy God, and because he cannot but be displeased at sin which is so contrary to his holy nature and will. But how shall we know if we love God for his holiness? If so, then you will love it in every stamp and impression thereof. You will love his law, not only for its usefulness to you, but chiefly for its innate purity and holiness; as the Psalmist did, *Thy word, says he, is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it (p)*. And you will love his people, not only because of your own interest in them, or for any benefit you have by them, but chiefly because you see a stamp of the divine holiness upon them.

Exhort. 4. Give God the glory of his holiness. His holiness is that whereby he acts like himself, in a conformity to the glorious perfections of his nature: Therefore, by giving him the glory of his holiness, you give him the glory of all his other perfections. He does not reckon himself to be glorified by you, unless you *sanctify* him, that is, manifest his name to be holy. So much is imported in that expression, *I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified (q)*. Unless you glorify his holiness, he accepts of nothing as a glory from you.

But how shall we give him the glory of his holiness? 1. By owning and acknowledging his infinite holiness in your own hearts. This is to *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts (r)*. What a deep sense had the Bethshemites of the divine holiness, when they cried out, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God (s)?* 2. By declaring and publishing to others what a holy God he is. So doth Hannah here in my text, *There is none holy as the Lord*. And Moses proclaims his holiness in a public song: *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods! who is like thee, glorious in holiness (t)!* And the Psalmist declares, *holy and reverend is his name (u)*. 3. By praising him for his holiness: as the Psalmist, *Let them praise thy great and terrible name, for it is holy (x)*. His holiness renders his greatness beautiful

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tiful

(p) Psal. cxix. 140. (q) Lev. x. 3. (r) 1 Pet. iii. 15. (s) 1 Sam. vi. 20. (t) Exod. xv. 11. (u) Psal. cxi. 9. (x) Psal. xcix. 3.

tiful and amiable. On this ground his people are called to rejoice and exult, *Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the holy One of Israel in the midst of thee (y)*. And his holiness renders his might worthy of praise. Hence Mary says in her song, *He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name (z)*. Therefore the Psalmist doubles and triples his exhortation to men to sing praises to God on the account thereof. *Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises: sing ye praises with understanding: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness (a)*. The mouths of the Seraphims are filled with the praises of it: *One cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts (b)*. And this also is the matter of the song of the four beasts: *They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty (c)*.

Particularly, give God the glory of his holiness in these cases. 1. When he executes judgment on wicked men for their sins. He is holy in his most terrible dispensations. He thereby sanctifies himself: That is, manifests the purity and holiness of his nature. Hence it is, that when God had threatened terrible judgments against Gog and Magog, he adds, *Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself (d)*. Moses and the children of Israel glorified the holiness of God when he executed judgment on Pharaoh and his host; *Who is like thee, glorious in holiness (e)*. 2. When he shews favour and kindness to his people. In every deliverance, in every grant of a mercy, God manifests his holiness, as I have formerly shewed. Hence covenant mercies are called by the apostle, *holy mercies (f)*, as the word in the original imports; as springing from the holiness of God. Therefore upon the receipt of every mercy, *Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness (g)*. 3. When God chastens you with cross and afflicting dispensations. He is holy in every one of them: They are according to the eternal law of his unstained nature. His throne is *the throne of his holiness (h)*. Though he is absolute Sovereign, yet he doth not act arbitrarily, but in a conformity to his glorious perfections: So that none can have any just ground or cause of complaint against him. Again, by afflicting providences he manifests his detestation of sin, and stamps a clearer impress of his holiness upon his people. The apostle tells us, *he chastens us*

(y) Isa. xii. 6.

(z) Luke i. 49

(a) Psal. xlvii. 6, 7, 8. (b) Isa. vi. 3. (c) Rev. iv. 8.
 (d) Ezek. xxxviii. 23. (e) Eod. xv. 11. (f) Acts xiii. 34.
 (g) Psal. xxx. 4. (h) Psal. xlvii. 8.

us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness (i). Therefore, how afflicting soever his dispensations be, own and acknowledge the holiness of his proceedings; justify and sanctify him, and study patience, submission, and contentedness of spirit, under his afflicting hand. This is to give him the glory of his holiness. So did the Psalmist, *O my God, says he, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent; But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel (k)*. As if he had said, Though I am in deep distress, and cry and am not heard; yet I cannot entertain one ill thought of thee: *Thou art holy; thou dost me no wrong; Thy dealings with me are not tainted with any iniquity.*

S E R M O N XXXIII.

Exhort. 5. **S**TUDY to be like God in holiness; to be partakers of his holiness (a). Pursue after a conformity to him therein. We have natures that are prone to imitate, and are much led by example. Commands may be more instructive, but examples are more attractive. Therefore such as would excel in any art or science; propose unto themselves the most excellent in that kind for their pattern. Now, in our endeavours after holiness, what can be more attractive of our imitation, than the holiness of God, which is the original and spring of all holiness in the creature? Therefore, it is not the holiness of the best men, nor the holiness of angels or archangels, that is proposed by the Spirit of God, as the chief and first object of our imitation, but the holiness of God. Hence the apostle exhorts, *As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy (b)*. So it is written in divers places in the Old Testament, *Ye shall be holy, for I am holy*. Again, *Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy (c)*. In which texts the holiness of God is proposed as an argument to excite us to holiness, and also as a pattern to be imitated by us; *Be ye holy, as he is holy*. The particle *as* doth not import an equal degree of holiness, which cannot be in any creature. In this sense there is none holy as the Lord (d). But it imports the same kind and truth of holiness; a holiness answerable to the divine in quality, not in equality.

All

(i) Heb. xii. 10.

(k) Psal. xxii. 2, 3.

(a) Heb. xii. 10. (b) 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. (c) Lev. xi. 44. and xix. 2.

(d) 1 Sam. ii. 2.

All men desire to be like God in glory and blessedness, but not in grace and holiness. Satan's temptation to our first parents was, *ye shall be as gods (e)*; not in a holy conformity, but in a self-sufficiency, which for a creature to aspire after is a cursed thing. But that which I bring to you is no temptation, but a remedy to recover the loss you sustained by that first temptation. By our fall in Adam, we lost the image, favour and fellowship of God. By losing his image, we lost his favour; and by losing his favour, we lost his fellowship. Therefore the way to recover his favour and fellowship, is first to recover his image. This is that which I am now exhorting you unto. Labour to recover what you lost in Adam; to have the image of God's holiness stamped upon your hearts and lives; *to be holy as God is holy*.

In prosecuting this exhortation, I shall,

1. Shew you wherein this likeness to God in holiness doth consist.
2. Propose some things by way of motive to excite and quicken you to the study thereof.
3. Give some directions to this purpose.

First, I am to shew wherein this likeness to God in holiness doth consist. For clearing this, observe that there is a two-fold holiness in the creature, habitual and actual.

1. Habitual holiness. This consists in the renovation of our natures, whereby our natures are purged from the filthiness that sticks to them, and an inward principle of sanctification and holiness is wrought in our hearts. Of this the apostle speaks, *If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work (f)*. Whence it appears that habitual holiness is necessary, that we may be meet for God's use and service, and prepared unto good works. Till a man act from such an inward principle, his best performances in religion are but a shew and shadow of holiness. Now, this habitual holiness is a stamp of the divine holiness on our nature. Hence renewed persons are said to be *made partakers of the divine nature*: And the new man is said to be *created after God in righteousness and true holiness*: And such as are renewed by grace are said to be *begotten of God, and born of God (g)*. They are his children by a spiritual regeneration. All which implies

(e) Gen. iii. (f) 2 Tim. ii. 21. (g) 2 Pet. i. 4. Eph. iv. 24. James i. 18. 1 John iii. 9. John i. 12, 13.

plies a likeness of nature. The new creature is framed to the most excellent pattern, even the holiness of God. Grace, that divine principle in the soul, being the highest perfection in the creature, must be in God essentially and originally: Therefore it must have a resemblance to him, as the copy hath to the original.

2. Actual holiness. This is our exerting and putting in action that inward principle of holiness which is wrought in us. This is a necessary fruit and evidence of the former: For habits are known by their acts. If there be a change of heart, there will be answerable fruits. This actual holiness is our acting in a conformity to the divine holiness; our imitating the holiness of God; our copying after that pattern. We are bidden *be holy as God is holy*. Now, as God's nature or essence is holy, so all his acts carry a condecency with his nature: For *he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works (h)*. So, the new creature acts like God. No nature is without actions proper to it: If therefore there be a likeness to God in nature, there will also be a likeness to him in actions. Particularly, this actual holiness, is either inward or outward, of heart or life. 1. Inward heart-holiness. This lies in the exercise of these graces, which are wrought in the heart at first regeneration; such as faith, love, hatred of sin, &c. There must be a conformity to God in holy affections and dispositions. As God loves and delights in himself, so must you love and delight in God. As God trusted Christ with the great concern of the redemption of lost elect sinners, so must you trust Christ with all your concerns. You must hate sin as God hates it, because of its inward filthiness; and love grace as God loves it, because of its native beauty; and love and delight in the saints as God doth, because they bear his image. Unless you have a likeness to God in his affection, you have no likeness to him in his nature. 2. Outward holiness, or holiness of life. That holiness whereby we resemble God shines in the conversation. Hence the apostle exhorts, *As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (i)*. Holiness in the heart diffuseth its influence throughout all the parts of the life. We must *walk as Christ walked*. He is not a partaker of the divine nature, who hath not escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (k).

More particularly, let us imitate the holiness of God in these

(h) Psal. cxlv. 17.
2 Pet. i. 4.

(i) 1 Pet. i. 15.

(k) 1 John ii. 6.

these things I took notice of as implied in it, according to our manner of conceiving. With respect to himself, it includes his acting like himself, and for himself: with respect to the creatures, it includes his infinite love to and delight in what is agreeable to his nature and will, and his hatred and abhorrence of whatsoever is contrary thereunto. Well then,

1. Doth God act always like himself, and as it becomes the excellency of his nature? So let us study to act like God. True holiness is, as an ancient expresses it *, a *likeness to God*. Hence it is called *godliness*, or *God-likeness*. So, let us study to be God-like, by walking worthy of God, and in imitation of him. This may be understood in a two-fold sense. 1. Doth God act as it becomes the excellency of his nature and his glorious perfection? So let us copy after him in his imitable perfections. Study to be good, merciful, just, true, and patient, as God is; that all who see you may behold and admire the glorious perfections of God shining forth in your lives. To this purpose the apostle speaks, *Shew forth the praises (orig. the virtues) of him that hath called you (l)*. One or other of the virtues of God should be still breaking forth in your lives. Let your holy graces appear as so many rays and little images of God. 2. Doth God act always congruously to his own nature? So let believers act congruously to the new nature in them. Labour to act like yourselves, as it becomes those that are renewed by grace, and made partakers of the divine nature. So the apostle exhorts, *Now ye are light in the Lord, walk as children of light (m)*.—Where the new nature in believers is made the pattern and rule for their obedience.—To the same purpose he speaks elsewhere, *As many as walk according to this rule (n)*—That is, according to the new nature in them; for of that the apostle had been speaking. Hence he exhorts the Colossians, *Lie not one to another; seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man (o)*. Well then, propound the new man of grace, or the new nature to yourselves, as the rule and pattern for ordering your life and conversation; and study to conform thereunto. Walk suitably to these gracious principles that are wrought in your hearts, and labour to live up to the power and height of them.

2. Doth God act in all things for himself, for his own glory? So let this be your ultimate scope and end in all that you

* *ὅμοιότης*.

(l) 1 Pet. ii. 9. (m) Eph. v. 8. (n) Gal. vi. 16. (o) Col. iii. 9, 10.

you do, *that God in all things may be glorified* (p). This is God-like, to fall in with him in the chief end of all his works. This transforms the soul into a divine nature. We cannot act more nobly than for the glory of God. A more high and noble end than God himself cannot be. And how reasonable and just is it, that he who is the First Cause of all things, should be the Last End of them. *I am Alpha and Omega*, says he, *the Beginning and the End. And I am the First and the Last* (q). This sanctifies holy duties, and spiritualizes natural and civil actions, and so is the very life and marrow of religion. Therefore, let your whole time, strength, parts, estate, and all your faculties and members, be consecrated to that eternal design of promoting the glory of God.

3. Doth God love and delight in holiness and holy persons? So do ye. Holiness is a most proper object for your love. It is a divine offspring; and though in man it be but a little spark, yet it resembles him who is all purity and holiness. It is a most amiable and attractive thing: It hath a charming beauty in it. Therefore love and delight in it. And love and delight in the saints because of their holiness. Even David, a great king, *delighted in them as the excellent ones in the earth* (r). If you do not love the visible image, you cannot love the invisible original. So the apostle tells us, *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen* (s)? Choose the saints for your companions. The psalmist was *a companion of all them that fear God* (t). Take pleasure in their society and converse, and love and delight in them, how mean soever they be in their worldly condition. It is glory enough in God's eye, that they are holy. Mark what there is of God in them, and observe the power and brightness of his image in them, and let your love to them be proportioned to that measure and degree of holiness that shines forth in their lives.

4. Doth God hate and abhor sin as contrary to his holy nature and will? So do ye. There cannot be true friendship between God and you, unless you hate what he hates. So much is implied in that which Christ says, *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate* (u). It will be your great commendation, to be conformed to him in this. It is Christ's commendation of the *angel of the church of Ephesus*, *Thou hatest* the

(p) 1 Pet. iv. 11.

(q) Rev. i. 8, 17.

(r) Psal. xvi. 3.

(s) 1 John iv. 20.

(t) Psal. cxix. 63.

(u) Prov. viii. 13.

the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate (x). If you have a sincere love to God, you cannot but hate what is so contrary to him: *Ye that love the Lord, says the psalmist, hate evil* (y). Sin is such an evil, that it cannot but be worthy of your hatred. It is called evil, by way of eminency, because it is the evil of evils, the cause of all other evils, and an only evil. Well then, hate sin: And hate it as God hates it. Does he hate sin as contrary to his nature? And does he hate it necessarily, intensely, perpetually, universally, only and purely? So do ye. 1. Hate sin because he hates it, and for these reasons for which he hates it. Hate it as sin, and because it is sin; contrary to the holy will and nature of God; as it is offensive and dishonourable to him. 2. Let it be a deep hatred, deeply rooted in your nature; such a hatred of sin as ariseth from a contrary principle within, so that you cannot but hate it. As God cannot look on sin (z), so there must be in you such an aversion to sin, that you cannot endure to see, hear, think, or speak of it, without dislike and loathing. 3. Hate sin intensely. It is a horrid evil, and to be hated accordingly. It must be a vehement hatred, such as hath life and vehemency in it: Such a hatred as ariseth to an abhorrence: *Abhor that which is evil* (a). Hate it as hell, as the word in the original imports. It must be such a hatred as ariseth to an enmity against it, and wars against it, and pursues it to the death. Sin is so contrary to God, so derogatory to his glory, and so mischievous to you, that you can never hate it enough. 4. Hate sin perpetually. In what place or time soever it be, still it is evil, and upon that account to be still hated. In sin all the just causes of hatred abide still, so that it is as hateful at last as at first. Your hatred of it must be irreconcilable and implacable. 5. Hate sin universally. Hate all sin, all kinds of sin, and all degrees of sin, yea, the very appearance of sin. *Hate even the garment spotted with the flesh* (b). And hate sin in all persons, even in them that are nearest and dearest to you. And hate it most of all in yourselves. *What I hate, says the apostle, that do I* (c). He hated sin in himself. 6. Hate sin only. It is an all-evil, and therefore to be hated with all hatred: not a drop or degree of hatred should be let out upon any thing else: All our hatred should be poured out upon it. Though we are to hate wicked men and enemies to God; yet not simply as men, for so our blessed Saviour hath taught

(x) Rev. ii. 6. (y) Psal. xlvii. 10. (z) Hab. i. 13.

(a) Rom. xii. 9.

(b) Jude 23.

(c) Rom. vii. 15.

taught us to love them; but as clothed with sin and wickedness (d): So that their sin is not only the ground and cause, but the formal and ultimate object of our hatred. And in this sense, we are even to *abhor ourselves* (e).

Thus we see wherein we are to imitate the holiness of God as our pattern. It is true, we cannot in all respects imitate his holiness, he being essentially, infinitely, and originally holy: Yet you ought in some respects to resemble the divine holiness. And, 1. As God is truly holy, and hath not a pretence of holiness, but a reality: So you must be truly and sincerely holy, and not make a shew of that holiness which you have not. You must shine with inward beauty toward God, as well as outward beauty toward men: For *the King's daughter is all glorious within, as her raiment is of wrought gold* (f). 2. As God is universally holy, *holy in all his ways*: So be ye *holy in all manner of conversation* (g): in every creek and turning of your lives. Be holy in all places and companies, at home and abroad, in secret and public; and in all your affairs, civil and sacred. A spirit of holiness must not only breathe in your holy duties, but also shine forth in your worldly employments and recreations. 3. As God is unchangeably holy, holy at all times: So you should endeavour to resemble him in this also. See that you *be holy still*. Persevere in a course of holiness; let not the feet of your conversation be like *the legs of the lame which are not equal* (h). In copying after this pattern, the divine holiness, let there not be here a word, and there a blot; one part of your life spiritual, and another carnal. 4. As God is exemplarily holy, the great pattern of all created holiness: So be ye examples of holiness to all that see or converse with you. *Let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.* And be *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world* (i). Labour to be like the believing Thessalonians, who were *ensamples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia, and whose faith to God-ward was spread abroad in every place* (k). Endeavour to leave a savour of true holiness behind you in every company into which you come.

(d) Psal. cxxxix. 21. Mat. v. 44. (e) Job xlii. 6. (f) Psal. xlv. 13. (g) Psal. cxlv. 17. 1 Pet. i. 15. (h) Rev. xxii. 11. Prov. xxvi. 7. (i) Mat. v. 16. Phil. ii. 15. (k) 1 Thess. i. 7, 8.

S E R M O N XXXIV.

Second, **I** Proceed to propose some arguments and motives, to excite and engage you to study this likeness and conformity to God in holiness. And,

1. His holiness alone is proposed as our pattern to be imitated by us. It is only in these moral perfections of holiness, goodness, and righteousness, that we are said to resemble God. Man is not said to be created after the image of God in power and wisdom, but in holiness and righteousness. The power of God was, as it were, the hand, and his wisdom the pencil that framed man: But his holiness was the pattern after which he was framed. So that it is the prerogative of the holiness of God to be the pattern of the rational creature. Hence, we are not commanded to be powerful and wise as God is, but to be holy as he is holy.

2. Your profession obliges you to this. The name of God and Christ is called upon you, as the name of a husband is called upon his wife, and the name of a father upon his child: You are called the spouses and children of God, and the servants and people of God (a). O it is a worthy name by which you are called; how careful should you be that you do not stain it? Alexander the Great gave this memento to one of his name, *Remember the name Alexander* †, to do nothing unworthy of it. You do not live suitably to your name, as the spouses and children of God, unless you study a likeness to him in holiness. This is that which becomes his children. Hence the apostle exhorts, *Be ye followers of God as dear children* (b).

3. Consider how necessary it is that ye be like God in holiness. And, 1. It is necessary to the honour of God. If ye do not study to resemble him in holiness, ye are called his people to his dishonour, and give occasion to others to blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called (c). So did the captive Jews: When the Babylonians observed how vicious they were in their lives, they took occasion therefrom to profane God's holy name, when they said to them, *These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land* (d). By your unholy conversation and unworthy deportment, you will bring

(a) James ii. 7. Isa. iv. 1. Gen. xlviii. 16.

† *Recordare nominis Alexandri.*

(b) Eph. v. 1. (c) James ii. 7. (d) Ezek. xxxvi. 20.

bring up an evil report on God, as if he were such an one as those that profess him appear to be. 2. It is necessary to your communion with God in grace and glory. So soon as Adam lost the image of God, he lost also his favour and fellowship. Likeness is the ground of communion and delight. *What gracious communion can there be between light and darkness (e), between an infinitely holy God and unholy sinners? God can take no pleasure in you, unless you bear his image; you cannot enjoy him, unless you resemble him: And without a likeness to him in holiness, you can take no pleasure in him, nor approach to him without terror. And you can have no hope to see him as he is, unless you be holy as he is holy: For every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure (f).* You can never be like him in glory, unless you be like him in grace first. 3. It is necessary as an evidence that you are his, and belong to him by a gracious title. Your resemblance to God in holiness is your badge and livery. This is the great evidence that you are born of God: For, says the apostle, *if ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doth righteousness is born of him (g).* This justifies us to be the seed of God. Without a stamp of God's holiness upon you, he cannot own you for his children. To give out that you are the children of God, is but a vain pretence, if you do not live and walk as it becomes such a high pedigree. 4. It is necessary as God's great end and design in all his dispensations. A likeness to God in holiness is, (1.) The end of election: For all God's peculiar people are *predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son (h).* This is that which God did chiefly intend to them in their eternal election, that they might be conformed to Christ, as in *sufferings and glory, so also in holiness; that they might be holy as he is holy, who is the image of the invisible God (i).* (2.) It is the end of redemption. God sent his Son, and the Son of God came, on this very errand, to repair the ruins of the fall, by recovering the image of God in elect sinners. *He loved the church, and gave himself for it: That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing: But that it should be holy and without blemish (k).* Hence he says in his prayer to the Father, *For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth (l).* (3.)

It

(e) 2 Cor. vi. 14. (f) 1 John iii. 3. (g) 1 John ii. 29.
 (h) Rom. viii. 29. (i) Col. i. 18. (k) Eph. v. 25, 26, 27.
 (l) John xvii. 19.

It is the end of providence, and particularly of cross and afflicting providences. *He chastens us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness (m).* That is, that holiness which hath some resemblance to his own. *He hedges up our way with thorns, that we may not find our paths to sin (n).* As parents correct their children, to bring them to an imitation of their manners; so God corrects his, to bring them to an imitation of his holiness. (4) It is the end of all the ordinances, and especially of the word and sacraments: For he *sanctifies and cleanses his church with the washing of water by the word (o).* The ordinances are the *glass wherein we behold the glory of God,* and particularly the glory of divine holiness, that we may be *thereby changed into the same image (p).*

4. A likeness to God in holiness is a great blessing and happiness: and that on these accounts. 1. This is the best way of honouring and glorifying God. We do not glorify him so much by high admirations and elevated praises of him, as by a resemblance to him in holiness, and bearing his image upon us. We thereby honour him in that perfection which is counted by him as the chief glory of his nature. In this sense we are said to sanctify God. *They shall sanctify the holy One of Jacob (q),* says the Prophet. We sanctify the holy One, when we manifest the purity and holiness of his nature by the holiness of our lives, and so give occasion to others to think and speak worthily of him. 2. A likeness to God in holiness is the greatest ornament of the soul. It is the chief excellency and beauty of a rational creature. We read of *the beauties of holiness (r),* It hath more of beauty in it than the whole creation. It is the very image of God upon the soul. Holiness is God's principal glory: Therefore he is said to be *glorious in holiness.* It is the beauty of the Deity: Hence it is said, *they praised the beauty of holiness (s).* The perfection of the divine nature lies chiefly in his unspotted purity and holiness. So that holiness in the creature is a beam of divine glory upon it. O then how beautiful must it be! Conformity to God in holiness was man's original happiness. This was our primitive glory and excellency. Man was *made after the image of God in holiness (t).* This was the ornament and crown of glory which God would put upon his master-piece in creation. And, as it was man's original happiness in crea-

tion,

(m) Heb. xii. 10. (n) Hos. ii. 6. (o) Eph. v. 26. (p) 2 Cor. iii. 18. (q) Isa. xxix. 23. (r) Psal. cx. 3. (s) Exod. xv. 11. 2 Chron. xx. 21. (t) Gen. i. 26.

tion, so it is our restored happiness in redemption: For *the new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness* (u). So that a likeness to God in holiness is the greatest glory and excellency a creature is capable of. In regard hereof *the King's daughter* is said to be *all glorious within* (x). What greater glory can there be, than to be the visible image of the holy invisible God? 3. This will fit you for communion with God. He cannot but take pleasure and delight in those that bear his image, and are like him in the glory and beauty of his nature. Says the Lord to his church, *Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, for the Lord delighteth in thee* (y). And it was her holiness that engaged his delight; therefore it follows, *And they shall call them, The holy people*. It is his own image that makes us amiable in his sight: *For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness: His countenance doth behold the upright* (z). Likeness is the ground of communion. *Like draws to like*, as the common proverb is. We love to converse most with them that are most like ourselves. So they enjoy God most, and have nearest communion with him, who are most like him. If God love himself for his holiness, then he cannot but love them best that are most holy. Again, this is the way to conformity to God in glory. *When he shall appear, says the apostle, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* (a). In heaven, the decrees of vision are according to the decrees of sanctification. We are *changed into God's image and likeness, from glory to glory* (b). So that a likeness to God in holiness is heaven begun upon earth: It is a sure pawn and pledge of the glory to come. Our likeness to God is begun here, and perfected hereafter. 4. This will give you boldness in the day of judgment. So the apostle speaks, *That we may have boldness in the day of judgment: Because as he is, so are we in this world* (c). On that day Christ will enquire concerning every man, as once he did concerning the piece of money, *whose image and superscription be both upon him*, whether the image of God, or the image of Satan. Such as bear the devil's image will on that day hang down their heads like condemned malefactors. But such of you as have God's image stamped upon you, will be able to lift up your face with humble and holy boldness and confidence: for Christ will surely own his own image, and acknowledge his mark and impress upon you.

5. God

(u) Eph. iv. 24.

(x) Psal. xlv. 13.

(y) Isa lxii. 4, 12.

(z) Psal. xi. 7.

(a) 1 John iii. 2.

(b) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

(c) 1 John iv. 17.

5. God hath for this end set up an image of his holiness in our own nature. The glory of God is too dazzling for our weak eyes; therefore his invisible glory is in Christ made, in a sort, visible in our nature. Hence Christ is called *the image of God* and *the image of the invisible God* (d). Christ is the image of God's holiness. The divine holiness being infinite and incomprehensible, we poor creatures cannot look upon it with our weak eyes, and so take our measures from it: therefore God hath in Christ, as incarnate, contempered this glorious perfection to our contemplation, that by *beholding* it we may be *changed into the same image* (e). God hath made his Son like us, that by imitating him we may arrive to some resemblance of his holiness: For *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father* (f). As it is a great advantage to have a pattern for our imitation, so a pattern in our own nature is more operative. The holiness of God is sweetened and tempered to us in Christ. The holiness of Christ is our immediate pattern; therefore believers are said to be *predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son* (g); but the holiness of God, as discovered to us in Christ, is our ultimate pattern.

6. It is the great end and design of a gospel ministry, to frame the souls of men into a likeness to God in holiness. This was the apostle's great design, and for this he laboured in pain: *My little children* says he, *of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you* (h). To have the souls of men endued with such qualifications, whereby they are conformed to God and Christ as their pattern; to have his image drawn on their hearts and lives; this is the great end to which God hath designed and appointed a gospel ministry. Hence it is that the Spirit of God confers upon ministers the honour and title of being spiritual *fathers* and *mothers*. They are appointed as instruments to hold up the *glass* of the word unto mankind, that by *beholding* therein *the glory* of the divine holiness in the face of Christ, they may be *changed into the same image* (i). So that the labours of ministers among you are lost and without fruit, if this end be not attained. Blessed be God, this hath been the great design and business of these worthy ministers of this congregation that are now in glory, three of whom have been removed by death within these five years †:

(d) 2 Cor. iv. 4. Col. i. 18. (e) 2 Cor. iii. 18. (f) John i. 14. (g) Rom. viii. 29. (h) Gal. iv. 19. (i) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

years †: And the late sad dispensation in removing by death that worthy man of God, who had deservedly so much room in your heart and mine, is clothed with very aggravating circumstances that are peculiar to it. I shall only add, that if we had improved his ministry better, with respect to the great end and design of it, and that for which he travailed in birth, viz. To have the image of the divine holiness drawn upon our hearts and lives, it may be such a heavy stroke had been prevented. And now, when he is gone to his everlasting rest, the greatest respect you can pay to his name and memory, and the greatest service you can do to him, is to look to it that his ministry, which you enjoyed for some time among you, obtain this blessed effect, to frame you into a likeness to God in holiness, that so you may be his joy and crown on that day when he and you shall meet again before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Well then, study to be like God in holiness. All of you have by nature the image of *the old man* upon you; therefore endeavour through grace to have at last the image of *the new man*, after the image of him that created you; that as you have borne the image of the earthly, you may also bear the image of the heavenly (*k*). Labour to live up to your pattern. Though you cannot attain, yet follow after. Though you cannot make out the lesson, yet you should be still scribbling at it. Grow in a conformity to God in holiness. Strive to come up to this divine pattern more and more. You are to be holy as God is holy: though there cannot be an equality, yet there may be a greater likeness, and more near resemblance. Gospel holiness is a growing holiness. That holiness is much to be suspected, that doth not grow up into a greater resemblance of the holiness of God; for *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*: and we are changed into God's image from glory to glory (*l*): That is, from one degree of grace to another. He must be a dull scholar that hath been long at the writing-school, and yet comes no nearer his copy. We have a high pattern, that we might not rest satisfied with low measures and degrees of grace and holiness. The more holy, the more glorious and excellent, because

† The very Reverend Mr. William Crightoun, who died Nov. 27. 1708, and Mr. George Meldrum, who died Feb. 18. 1709, and Mr. John Stedman, who died Nov. 24. 1713.

(*k*) Col. iii. 10. 1 Cor. xv. 49. (*l*) Prov. iv. 18. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

cause then the image of God in you will be the more beautiful and illustrious. The more holy, the more like God; and the more like God, you shall have the more love from him, and the more near and intimate communion with him.

Third, I shall, in the last place, give some directions what to do that you may be holy as God is holy. And, 1. Seek to be renewed by grace. Renewing grace is the impression of the image of God upon us; for *the new man is created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness*; and we are renewed after the image of him that created us (m). Till you have a stamp of God's holiness upon your nature, you are in no capacity to copy after it in your life and practice. 2. Make it your great design and scope to be like God in holiness. Such an excellent end and design will elevate and ennoble your spirit, and enlarge your soul in its operations. When it is your great scope to be holy as God is holy, this will point out your work, and hold you at it. When the bent of your heart stands this way, there will thence arise a holy quickness, liveliness, and vigour of soul: For a man is much under the direction, power, and government of that which he makes his great end. 3. Be often eyeing your pattern. He that would learn to write fair, hath his eye frequently on his copy. So, frequent views of the holiness of God will quicken you to the study of a conformity to him therein. This will enlarge your gracious desires, so that you will not rest content with low measures of grace and holiness. Setting before us excellent examples useth to spur us on to an imitation of them: So, when the holiness of God is often viewed by you as your pattern, this will fill you with a holy generosity to imitate him therein; it will make you act like men of another spirit. But see that you view the holiness of God especially as it is discovered in Christ: For it is not an object of our imitation but as it is tempered in Christ to our view. The frequent contemplation of it, as it shines in the face of Christ, is a mean to transform you into the same image (n): 4. Get much love to God, and love him particularly for his holiness. This will draw and allure you to an imitation of him therein. Love studies to draw the picture of the party beloved. When your soul is ravished with the holiness of God, then you will earnestly desire and endeavour to have the image of it drawn upon your hearts and lives, and the impressions of it there will be most delightful to you. 5. If you would intimate

(m) Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10. (n) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

imitate God's holiness as your pattern, make his law your rule, and study to conform to it, and to regulate yourselves by it. *As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy (o).* The law of God is a ray of his pure and holy nature, a transcript of his holiness: The purity of his nature shines forth in it. When you conform to his law, you study to resemble his purity in the copy he hath set to you. 6. Employ Christ. He came to restore the image of God that was defaced and lost by sin. This was the end of his incarnation, death, and sufferings. Employ him to accomplish the ends and fruits of them in your soul. Rest and rely on him by faith; for *he is made of God to us sanctification (p).* 7. Use the promises for this end. Believers have *given unto them exceeding great and precious promises, that by these they might be partakers of the divine nature (q).* There are, (1.) Promises of holiness. Many of them concern our sanctification, the stamping of God's image on us, the changing of our hearts, the cleansing and healing of our natures. As, when God promiseth to his people, to give them *a new heart and a new spirit; to cleanse them from all their filthiness, and all their idols; to put his Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments and do them; to put his laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts; to sanctify them, and make them holy, and wash away their filthiness (r).* Act faith on Christ in these promises; rest on him for the blessings promised; and plead the promises in prayer. (2.) Promises to holiness, there are many promises that serve to draw and allure us to the study of a conformity to God in holiness, by proposing to us a rich and free reward, great and glorious blessings, even in this life, and an unspeakable happiness in the world to come. Believe these promises; and improve your belief of them as a spur to your soul. 3. Carry well toward the holy Spirit. It is his work to frame your soul into a likeness to God in holiness. Hence he is called *the holy Spirit, and the Spirit of holiness.* The image of God in us, is an image, not made by a painter or carver, but by the Holy Ghost. We are *changed into God's image by the Spirit of the Lord (s).* The Spirit is in believers a Spirit of holiness, of grace, of love to and zeal for God. O deal kindly with the blessed Spirit. Take heed of grieving, quenching, resisting, or vexing him. Welcome his

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motions

(o) Gal. v. 16. (p) 1 Cor. i. 30. (q) 2 Pet. i. 4. (r) Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27. Heb. viii. 10. Exod. xxxi. 13. Isa. iv. 3, 4. Joel iii. 17. Zech. xiv. 20. (s) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

motions and breathings. He comes to frame you into a likeness to God.

S E R M O N XXXV.

Exhort. 6. **W**OULD you be made holy, or more holy? Go to God for this. He is originally holy; the Fountain of holiness. Seek to God for the new heart and new spirit, to be made *partakers of the divine nature*. And seek to God to be made more like him, more conformed to him in holiness. Our blessed Lord addresseth himself to the Father, under the title of Holy Father for the sanctification of his people. *Holy Father, says he, sanctify them through thy truth (a).* And the apostle prays for the Thessalonians, that *the very God of peace might sanctify them wholly (b).*

To quicken and excite you to have recourse to God for sanctification and holiness, consider, 1. You are naturally unholy: For *what is man, that he should be clean? and he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? And, Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? And, How can he be clean that is born of a woman? We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses, are as filthy rags (c).* Yea, the best are but in part holy here in this life. Much filthiness still remains. David, though a man after God's own heart, cries out, *Lord, wash, and cleanse, and purge me (d).* And the prophet Isaiah cries out, *Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips (e).* Too much of the image of Satan still remains in the most eminent saints on earth. 2. It is God that must sanctify you, and make you holy. *I am the Lord, says he, who sanctify you (f).* None can repair a depraved nature, but the Author of nature. When a watch is out of order, we send it to the workman: So, it is God that must *create you unto good works (g).* And, (1.) You cannot make yourselves holy. Like children, you can defile yourselves, but cannot cleanse yourselves. You are naturally in love with your own deformity, and will not admit of the beauty of holiness, without a divine power inclining your hearts to it, and making you willing to be partakers of it. (2.) No outward means can make you holy without God. Sanctification is indeed ascribed to the word. *Now ye are clean, says Christ,*
through

(a) John xvii. 11, 17. (b) 1 Theff. v. 23. (c) Job xv. 14.
xiv. 4. and xxv. 4. Isa. lxiv. 6. (d) Psal li. (e) Isa. vi. 5.
(f) Lev. xx. 8. (g) Eph. ii. 20.

through the word that I have spoken unto you: And in his prayer to the Father, *Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth* (b). But the word is only the mean or instrument; all the saving efficacy is of God. He alone can stamp his own image upon your soul. Who can make you partakers of the divine nature, but God himself? Holy duties, holy ordinances, holy ministers, cannot make you holy. Ministers are but instruments, ordinances the conduit-pipes; God himself is the Spring and Fountain of holiness. 3. There is a sufficiency in God for this end, as a God of infinite holiness. He is not only *THE holy One*, but *OUR holy One* (i). As he hath power to preserve you, wisdom to guide you, goodness to supply you, and mercy to pardon you; so he hath holiness to purify you. He is *the God of all grace*, and is able to make all grace abound toward you (k). He can soon set the beauty of holiness on the most deformed heart among you. As he is the Fountain of holiness; so he is a full Fountain: There is as much in him now as ever. 4. You may come to God with hope. His holiness is as ready to impart itself now, as it was at man's first creation. He loves to send forth the streams of this perfection more than of any other. He makes no man perfectly powerful, nor perfectly wise; but he makes some perfectly holy: The work is begun here, and perfected hereafter. He is the Fountain of holiness: You may have enough, if you be not wanting to yourselves.

For your direction, 1. Make your peace with God through Christ. He sanctifies as a *God of peace*. Hence the apostle prays, *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly* (l). He imparts his holiness to such as are reconciled to him. He is first a *God of peace*, and then a *God of holiness*. We are first justified, and then sanctified. Therefore get your peace made with God through Christ, in the first place. 2. Be much in prayer. Pray that God would sanctify you. Plead with him the holiness of his own nature, as Christ did for his disciples; *Holy Father, sanctify them through thy truth* (m). "O God, thou art infinitely holy; sanctify me, and make me holy." You cannot have a stronger plea. Pray with the psalmist, *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me* (n). 3. Wait on God in all the ways and means of his appointment. Particularly, be diligent in reading and hearing

(b) John xv. iii. and xvii. 17. (i) Isa. xliii. 15. (k) 1 Pet. v. 10. 2 Cor. ix. 8. (l) 1 Thess. v. 23. (m) John xvii. 11, 17. (n) Psal. li. 10.

hearing the word, and in the due use of the sacrament; for *God sanctifies with the washing of water by the word (o)*. Though the apostle mentions only baptism, or the washing of water; yet the other sacrament of the Lord's Supper is also understood, seeing there is the same reason of both. I say then, be diligent in the use of these ordinances. But rest not there. Look to God and wait on him in the use of them. Ministers may say to you, as Peter said to the people on another occasion, *Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness (p)*, we could make you holy. The gifts of a minister may fill your heads with notions, but not your hearts with grace. 4. When you go to God for grace and holiness, acquiesce in his wise dispensation, in conferring it by small measures and degrees. You are but like narrow-mouthed vessels, that receive the liquor only by little and little; and like vessels of a small quantity, that cannot contain much. You are not capable to receive all that God hath to give. But if still you breath and pant after more, you shall at last be filled with all the fulness of God, and be made perfect in grace and holiness.

Use 4. For direction in our worship. Worship should always be proportioned to the object worshipped. A holy God should have a holy worship. We must be holy in all our converses with him. *Holiness becomes his house for ever (q)*. What hath a holy God to do with unholy services? I recommend three things to you. 1. Come to worship an infinitely holy God with suitable preparation. 2. Worship him in a holy manner. 3. Labour to come away more holy, when you have been worshipping and conversing with a holy God.

1. Come to worship an infinitely holy God with suitable preparation. God abhors whatever is contrary to his immaculate purity; therefore be afraid to bring any thing before him that may offend the eyes of his holiness. Alas, what unprepared addresses do many make to him? Such are worse than heathens, who used to make some preparation by purifying and washing themselves, before they sacrificed, or entered into their temples. It is a great contempt of the divine holiness, to come into his presence without suitable preparation, as if any blemished and polluted sacrifice were good enough for him, and he deserved no better.

But what preparation should be made?

(1.) See that you be in a holy state. If you expect communion with God, you must be like him, partakers of the divine

(o) Eph. v. 26. (p) Acts iii. 12. (q) Psal. xciii. 5.

divine nature. He will shut out from his presence, and debar from communion with him, all that bear no resemblance to him, all unholy persons; for the *foolish shall not stand in his sight*: He *hateth all workers of iniquity* (r). He will have nothing to do with filthy sinners: He will not be of their communion. *He will not help the evil-doers* (s). Orig. *He will not take them by the hand*. He will have no intimacy with them. And they shall have nothing to do with him: For *unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth* (t)? Well then, as you must be washed from sin in the blood of Christ, so you must be sanctified by his Spirit (u). These two are inseparable. You must be purified and washed from your filthiness. *Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings. Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded* (x). Come, loathing yourselves, to the fountain of Christ's blood, and rest on him, not only for pardon, but for the sanctification of your natures, and redemption from sin: For *he is made of God to us, not only wisdom and righteousness, but also sanctification and redemption* (y). You must be cleansed and purified when you draw near to God in duty, else an infinitely holy God cannot draw nigh to you. Again, a principle of grace must be wrought in you. *As the old man must be put off, so the new man must be put on* (z). Your soul must be adorned with holy graces, else a holy God can take no pleasure in any of your performances.

(2.) Get a holy frame; holy and prepared affections and dispositions. Consider God's infinite purity and holiness. *Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God* (a). His purity and holiness calls for holy and prepared addresses to him. *Draw not nigh hither*, says the Lord to Moses; keep a due distance: *Put off thy shoes from off thy feet*; as servants were wont to do at that time in their master's presence, in token of their reverence, humility, and submission; *for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground* (b). 1. Get awful and reverend apprehensions of the holy majesty of God. It is said of Moses, *that he was afraid to look upon God* (c). *He will be sanctified in them that come nigh him* (d). 2. Get a deep humbling sense of your own

(r) Psal. xv. 5. (s) Job viii. 20. (t) Psal. l. 16. (u) 1 Cor. vi. 11. (x) Isa. i. 16, 17, 18. James iv. 8. (y) 1 Cor. i. 30. (z) Eph. iv. 24. (a) Josh. xxiv. 19. (b) Exod. iii. 5. (c) Exod. iii. 6. (d) Lev. x. 3.

own vileness and unworthiness to come into his presence. How humble was Abraham? *Behold now, says he, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes (e).* Humility is the fittest posture in our addresses to God. *O come,* says the Psalmist, *let us worship, and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker (f).* Come into his presence lothing and abhorring yourselves in his sight. 3 Labour to have every thing removed that is unbecoming his holy and spotless majesty. Get your filthiness purged away. Then may you draw near with holy confidence and hope of success. *If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles: for then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot (g).* Even such as are washed, do yet need to wash their feet (h), that is, to purge their affections and conversation from the filth they daily contract. There ought to be a special purgation before worship. Hence the psalmist says, *I will wash mine hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar, O Lord (i).* The washing the hands was but the outward symbol. Clean hands without a pure heart, signify nothing. You cannot expect communion with a holy God, if you come in your filthiness.

2. Worship a holy God in a holy manner. Such as served before the heathen gods were clothed in white, an emblem of purity. And communion with God in heaven is expressed by *walking with him in white (k).* We should so walk with God, even in this life, so much as we can, and serve him in a pure and holy manner. Our duties of immediate worship should have special holiness in them, because in them we draw near to a holy God, who *will be sanctified in them that come nigh him (l).* And, 1. Sanctify him by an awful sense of his infinite holiness. O what reverence and adoration should there be in our worship! With what reverence will men stand before their superiors! How much more reverence ought there to be, when we converse with a God of infinite holiness? Is a piece of filthy clay more valuable than an infinitely holy and glorious Majesty? 2. How humble should we be when we are in his presence who *cannot look upon iniquity?* The psalmist gives this reason why we should prostrate ourselves before God in the lowest posture of humility, *worship at his footstool: for he is holy (m).* This is the cause of that self-lothing and abhorrence which the saints express whenever they have to do with God;

(e) Gen. xviii. 27. (f) Psal. xcv. 6. (g) Job. xi. 14, 15.
 (h) John xiii. 10. (i) Psal. xxvi. 6. (k) Rev. iii. 4. (l) Lev.
 2. 3. (m) Psal. xcix. 5.

God; as Isaiah, when he heard the seraphims sound forth the praises of his holiness: *Woe is me, says he, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.* And Job, when he had seen God, *abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes* (n). Even the holiest men have cause to be ashamed and humbled when they come before God. The holy *seraphims cover their faces* (o), as being ashamed of themselves in his presence. Certainly we who are poor sinful creatures, and have so many defects and imperfections, should tremble more than we do, when we have to do with the holy God. 3. Having to do with a God of infinite holiness, let us, in our worship, be at the greatest distance from sin. How unbecoming is it to carry ourselves loosely and carelessly in his presence? Oh, will you dare to conceive or entertain carnal, vain, or unclean thoughts, in the presence of an infinitely holy majesty?

Well then, in all our addresses to God, let us get and entertain a deep sense of his infinite holiness upon our hearts. Let us view him in this part of his glory. A deep sense of this would elevate us in praise (p), and humble us in prayer (q), and fill us with holy fear in any thing wherein we have to do with God. The sense of it made the men of Bethshemesh cry out, *who is able to stand before this holy Lord God* (r)? We have to do with a God that sitteth upon a *throne of holiness* (s). O what reverence should there be of his majesty! What a humble sense of our own vileness before him! What holy ardor of spirit in his service! God is so holy, that though our worship were as pure as that of angels, yet we could not present him with a service meet for his holy nature. Even our best duties are unmeet for his immaculate purity; and shall we bring the lame and the sick for an offering to him? What a slight do we put upon his majestic holiness, when we think to put him off with a lame and imperfect service?

3. See that ye come away more holy, when you have been worshipping and conversing with a holy God. As they that have looked on the sun, go away with their eyes so dazzled, that whatever they look upon, they seem still to see the sun: so the people of God never meet with him in duty, but they come away with some clearer impress of his holiness upon them. When Moses came down from the mount, where he had been conversing with a God glorious in holiness, his *face did shine*: some beams of the divine glory were seen in his very counte-

(n) Isa. vi. 5. Job. xlii. 6. (o) Isa. vi. 2. (p) Psal. xlvii. 6, 8.
(q) Gen. xviii. 27. (r) 1 Sam. vi. 20. (s) Psal. xlvii. 8.

countenance. And how was his heart filled with indignation against sin, so that, when he saw the people sacrificing to the calf, he *brake the tables* (t)? So, when you have been conversing with God in duty, labour to come away with such a stamp of God's holiness upon you, as your hearts may be filled with indignation against sin, and your frame and walk may be more holy and heavenly. How sad is it, that many times we return from duties of worship with so little of God upon our spirits? None would think that we had been conversing with a holy God, there is so small a resemblance of his holiness to be seen upon us. You wonder if a man come away cold from the fire: but it is no less a wonder, to come away from a holy God with vile affections. Therefore, whenever you go to God in duty, labour to be so holy, spiritual, and heavenly, in your converse with him, and to have such discoveries of his glory, as you may come back with something of God upon your hearts, and a divine lustre on your lives. How sad is it to be like the beasts in Noah's ark, to go in unclean, and come out unclean? God is glorified, when you come from worship with some prints of his holiness on your hearts and lives.

Use 5. For comfort to the saints; such as are truly holy. The consideration of the holiness of God may comfort you, 1. With respect to yourselves, in particular. 2. With respect to the case of the church, in general.

1. With respect to yourselves in particular. You may rejoice in the holiness of God: as Hannah in her song: *My heart, says she, rejoiceth in the Lord*; and then it follows, *There is none holy as the Lord* (u). It is indeed matter of joy to all the saints, that their God is infinitely holy. The thoughts of this may fill your hearts with joy. For, 1. The holiness of God, as well as the other perfections of his nature, is made over to you by covenant, so far that you have an interest in it. He is not only *THE holy One*, but *YOUR holy One* (x). It is a pleasure to the saints to claim their interest in God as a God of infinite holiness, even in the saddest times. So it was to the prophet Habbakuk under the captivity; *O Lord my God, says he, mine holy One* (y). 2. God's holiness renders his other attributes comfortable. The consideration of his other perfections would be terrible and affrighting without this. Neither his mercy, nor his power, nor his wisdom, could render the thoughts of him comfortable, if his holiness did not influence them.

(t) Exod. xxxii. 19. (u) 1 Sam. ii. 2. (x) Isa. xliiii. 15.
(y) Hab. i. 12.

them. But this being the lustre of all his other perfections, gives believers a very comfortable idea of him. 3. His holiness may assure you who are holy that you are high in his favour. The psalmist pleads thus, *Preserve me, for I am holy* (z). Or, as it is rendered in the margin of some Bibles, *I am one whom thou favourest*. Holy persons are favourites of heaven. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright* (a). He smiles upon them, and looks upon them with pleasure. Holiness in your hearts and lives is an image and resemblance of the holiness of God; and he will certainly highly value such an image of himself.

Particularly, the holiness of God may be a ground of comfort to you in these cases.

(1.) When you are under fears and apprehensions of evil days approaching. You fear what shall become of you. But God would have you stifle all your perplexing and disquieting fears, with the thoughts of his holiness. *Fear not, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the holy One of Israel* (b). You have to do with a holy God, who, in times of greatest confusion, will certainly distinguish between the precious and the vile. All God's saints are in his hand; and *none can pluck them out of his hand*. Hence the psalmist pleads, *Preserve me, for I am holy* (c). The holy One will surely preserve and protect his holy ones in evil days.

(2.) In great troubles and afflictions. Being a God of infinite holiness, you may be assured that he will do you no wrong; and that he will not pour out all his wrath, but stay his rough wind in the day of the east wind. So he tells us by the prophet, *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: For I am God, and not man, the holy One in the midst of thee* (d). Being your holy One, he will be your Saviour, and not condemn you to death and destruction. Thus the prophet encourageth himself: *O Lord my God, mine holy One, we shall not die* (e).

(3.) In your broken and disconsolate condition. It is as an holy God that he revives and refreshes the spirits of his people, when they are *humble and broken-hearted* (f). The holiness of his nature moves him to pity his people in their drooping and disconsolate condition. Tho' he be *the high and lofty One*, yet *his name is holy*: Therefore his saints need not

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P p

fear

(z) Psal. lxxxvi. 2.

(a) Psal. xi. 7. (b) Isa xli. 14. (c) Deut. xxxiii. 7. John x. 28. Psal. lxxxvi. 2. (d) Hos. xi. 9. (e) Hab. ii. 12. (f) Isa. lvii. 15.

fear his power; such is the holiness of his nature, that he will not misemploy it.

(4.) When you are in fears of falling away. His holiness stands engaged for your perseverance. Hence our blessed Lord addresses himself to the Father, under the title of Holy Father, when he pleads for the preservation of his people: *Holy Father, I say he, keep through thine own name, these whom thou hast given me (g).* Grace being an image of God's holiness, his holiness engages him in the preservation of it. Surely he will not neglect that which is so like him, and on that account so dear to him.

(5.) When you sigh and groan under your great imperfection in grace and holiness. You find grace so weak, and see such a dunghill of corruption within, that your heart sinks within you. But the holiness of God may assure you, that he will in due time perfect his begun work of holiness in your soul. He glorifies his holiness in the sanctification of his people; therefore he will surely crown and perfect that work, that the glory of his holiness may receive its full manifestation. O how comfortable is this!

(6.) When your faith is like to fail, and you are apt to stagger at the promise of God through unbelief. The holiness of God may assure you of the accomplishment of the promises. As a man's honesty gains a reputation to his word; so the holiness of God gives credit to his promise. Therefore, his promise is attested in with a declaration of his holiness, to give check to distrust: *Thus saith the high and lofty One, whose name is Holy, I dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, &c (h).* And, when he would give his people the highest security for the accomplishment of his promise, he swears by his holiness: *Once have I sworn, says he, by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David (i).* So that not only his truth, but his holiness also, is laid in pledge for the stability of his covenant. This is matter of joy to the saints, as it was to the psalmist: *God hath spoken in his holiness, says he, I will rejoice (k).*

2. With respect to the case of the church in general. The holiness of God is a ground of comfort in the calamities of the church. Though he cast his church into the furnace, yet he will not utterly consume her, nor execute the fierceness of his anger, but will moderate and mitigate judgments, because he is the holy One in the midst of her (l). His holiness stands engaged

(g) John xvii. 11. (h) Isa. lvii. 15. (i) Psal. lxxxix. 35.

(k) Psal. lx. 6. (l) Hol. xi. 9.

gaged in an inviolable covenant, to perpetuate Christ's throne and kingdom, and to preserve a seed to serve and honour him throughout all generations; according to that promise, *My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me (m).* Therefore his people may be confident of the protection and preservation of the church, and that she shall not be given over to death and ruin, as the prophet was, in that text already quoted: *O Lord my God, says he, mine holy One, we shall not die (n).* Again, being a God of infinite holiness, therefore, as he disapproves sin, and punishes it in his church and people; so he will not spare it in their enemies. His holiness stands engage to avenge upon them the blood of his saints. This animated the importunity of the souls under the altar, who cried with a loud voice, saying, *How long O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth (o)?* God's holiness gives ground to expect, that his cause shall not always suffer, and that the violence and oppression of enemies shall not go unpunished.

(m) Psal. lxxxix. 34, 35, 36. (n) Hab. i. 12. (o) Rev. vi. 10.

DISCOURSE VIII.

Of the Goodness of God.

SERMON XXXVI.

Zach. ix. 17. *How great is his goodness!*

GOD had manifested much of his goodness to his ancient people the Jews, not only in returning their captivity from Babylon, but also in affording them a fair opportunity of rebuilding the temple, the place of his solemn worship. But they were remiss in improving the opportunity he put in their hand; partly through love to their carnal ease; and partly through discouragement, because of the difficulties they met with. Therefore God was pleased to send this prophet, to excite them to their work, and to encourage them in it. Particularly, besides all former manifestations of the goodness of God to them, they are encouraged by promises of more of his goodness to be manifested in due time. Accordingly,

cordingly, we have, from verse 9th of this chapter, promises of Christ's coming in the flesh, and of the flourishing state of his kingdom, and of the benefits and privileges thereof. In consideration of all which, the prophet breaks out into a holy admiration of the great goodness of God, in the words read, *How great is his goodness!*

The words may be understood, either of his relative goodness, in the blessings and benefits which he bestows upon his people, which is indeed admirably great; Or of his absolute goodness, the goodness of his nature; and truly, if God let out so much goodness to his people, how much more goodness must there be in himself who is the Fountain? The prophet admires this: *How great is his goodness!* He could not tell how great it is; but he admires it, and leaves it to us to do the like.

The doctrine is this.

As goodness is one of the excellencies and perfections of God; so his goodness is admirably and inexpressibly great.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall shew,

1. *That God is good.*
2. *What the goodness of God is.*
3. *That God is matchless in his goodness: none can compare with him in it.*
4. *Wherein his goodness is manifested. From both which it will appear that his goodness is inconceivably great, great to admiration.*
5. *I shall apply the doctrine.*

First, That God is good; or, goodness is an excellency or perfection of the divine nature. This is evident,

1. From scripture. The divine goodness is often celebrated in the Book of Psalms; and men are often invited to sing forth the praises of it: particularly, how often is that repeated by the psalmist, *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness* (a). The scripture sets forth the goodness of God, 1. Affirmatively, when it expressly affirms that God is good. *Good and upright is the Lord*, says the psalmist; and, *Thou art good, and thou dost good* (b). It is asserted as an undoubted truth. *Truly God is good to Israel* (c). 2. Symbolically; when it celebrates the riches of his goodness (d). There are riches unsearchable,

(a) Psal. cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31. (b) Psal. xxv. 8, and cxix. 68.
(c) Psal. lxxiii. 1. (d) Rom. ii. 4.

able, an inexhaustible treasure of goodness. 3. Effectively; when it affirms that he made all things good. So it is said, in the history of creation, that *God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good (e)*.

2. From reason. And, 1. Goodness is a perfection and excellency in the creatures. The more perfect any thing is, the more it doth communicate itself: And the more good and bountiful any man is, the better he is. A good man is much loved and esteemed. *Peradventure*, says the apostle, *for a good man, some would even dare to die (f)*. A good man, that is a bountiful man, who is a common good in the place where he lives. Now, goodness being a perfection in created beings, must therefore be eminently in God. Being the most excellent nature, nothing can be better or more bountiful than he. 2. God is the Spring and Fountain of all that goodness that is in the creatures; from him it is derived: Therefore he himself must needs be better than all. Had he not been good in himself, nothing could have been endowed with any goodness by him. Created goodness is but a shadow, and speaks something more excellent in the copy. And seeing there are varieties of goodness in the creatures, therefore he must possess all these scattered goodnests in their fulness and perfection; so that he must be *all good, the chief goodness*. 3. The works of God are a plain and convincing argument of his goodness. No divine attribute doth more eminently shine forth to us in the book of the creation, than this. It is this that the apostle seems to understand by his God-head, which he says is *clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (g)*. The God-head, as comprehending the whole nature of God, is impossible to be known by the works of creation: Therefore his God-head there, must be understood in a more limited sense; and nothing else can be more properly meant than his goodness, which was the only motive of the work of creation. 4. God is to be loved, honoured, served, and worshipped by man: Therefore he must be good; for if he were not good, he could be worthy of no such respect from the creatures. 5. The notion of the divine goodness is natural to men. Plato styles him *the best Being* *; and the *Good* †, is one of the names that the Platonists expressed him by: And *the Best and Greatest* ‡, was the name whereby the Romans entituled him. And Seneca says, that *the first thing in our worship, is to believe the being of God; and then to as-*
scribe

(e) Gen. i. 31. (f) Rom. v. 7. (g) Rom. i. 20.

* Κρείττον, † το ἀγαθόν. ‡ Optimus Maximus.

scribe unto him Majesty, and Goodness, without which there can be no majesty §. Some say the name God cometh from good. All nations have named him to be Good. The idolatry of the heathens, in ranking these in the number of their deities, who had been most useful and beneficial to men; and in adoring the sun, moon, stars, and other creatures that were sensibly good to them, is a clear testimony of the sense they had of the bounty and goodness of God. So that goodness is inseparable from the notion of God. Hence the apostle calls his goodness his *God-head* (b). His goodness is his glory and God-head. Therefore, when Moses desired to *see his glory*, the Lord tells him, that he would give him a prospect of his goodness; *I will, says he, make all my goodness pass before thee* (i). We cannot conceive him God, unless we conceive him good, yea, the highest good.

Second, I go on to shew, What the goodness of God is; or, in what sense it is attributed to him.

The goodness of God is twofold, absolute, and relative.

1. The absolute goodness of God, is that whereby he is conceived to be good in himself, without any relation to his creatures. It is twofold, moral and natural. His moral goodness is his holiness and purity. Hence it is joined with uprightness: *Good and upright is the Lord* (k). Of this I have spoken formerly. His natural goodness is the goodness of his nature or essence, the absolute perfection of his nature. All creatures have a natural goodness in them, a goodness of being; though some of them lost their moral goodness: And the more of being any thing hath, the more natural goodness it hath. In this sense God is sovereignly and infinitely good. All other beings are no beings in comparison of him. His nature is infinitely perfect. He hath all things requisite to a most perfect and sovereign Being. Nothing is wanting to his essence, nor defective in it; and nothing can be added to it, to make it better: So that all the attributes of God are comprehended under this notion. He is the first Being, and therefore, as Plato saith *, must needs be the *first Good*. And being the *first Good*, he is therefore *good of himself*. He is the *good of every thing that is good* †: All that goodness that is in the

§ *Primus est deorum cultus, Deos credere: deinde reddere illis majestatem suam, et reddere bonitatem sine qua nulla majestas.*

(b) Rom. i. 20. (i) Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. (k) Psal. xxv. 8.

† τὸ ὅλον ὄν, τὸ πᾶν ἄγαθόν.

‡ *Tolle hoc et illud, vide ipsum bonum, si potes; ita Deum videbis, non alio bono bonum, sed bonum omnis boni.* Aug. de Trin. L. 8. C. 3.

the creatures springs from him; and it is infinitely better in him, than in them. Again, as he is the *chief Being*, so he is the *chief Good* †: All good meets in his essence. All the distinct kinds of goodness in the creatures are eminently summed up in him. All perfection of good, both extensive and intensive, is in him alone; and in him there can be nothing but good: So that nothing better or more excellent can be conceived. Hence, he is sufficient to all for their complete happiness; and is a satisfying good, able to fill and satiate the soul: So that he is the most desirable object. Good is that which for some perfection of its nature, is desirable: But nothing is wanting to the absolute perfection of the divine nature; therefore God should be to us the chief object of our desires, as he was to the psalmist: *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* says he, *and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee* (1). Other things are good *as the means*, and so are good only in order, proportion, and respect: But God is good *as the end*, and therefore absolutely good. Beyond him there is nothing to be sought or aimed at, to make us happy.

2. The relative goodness of God, is his goodness as it stands in relation to the creature; a perfection of his nature, as related to us, and which he exerciseth toward his creatures. So that by it we understand his bounty or benignity. This is that which the scripture expresseth by the term of goodness. So, *a righteous man*, and *a good man* (m), are distinguished.

Particularly, this relative goodness of God may be considered, either as it is in God, or as it is let out to the creatures. The psalmist speaks of both, *Thou art good, and doest good* (n). *He is good*, that denotes his nature and inclination; he is good in himself: *And he doeth good*, that denotes his work, whereby he gives proof of his goodness: For every thing acts according to its nature.

(1.) God's relative goodness may be considered as it is in himself, and so it is his inclination or self-propension to deal well or bountifully with his creatures. It implies these two things. 1. A fulness in himself of whatsoever can be useful and comfortable to us. For his relative goodness flows from his absolute goodness, or the natural perfection of the Deity. He is *God all-sufficient* (o), as the word may be rendered. Were he not infinitely full in himself, he could not be infinitely good and diffusive to us. There is in him an
inexhaustible

† *Omne bonum in summo bono.*

(1) Psal. lxxiii. 25. (m) Rom. v. 7. (n) Psal. cxix. 68.

(o) Gen. xvii. 1.

inexhaustible treasure of all good things, whence the whole world might be abundantly supplied, with whatever they need for soul and body, for time and eternity. *For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly (p).* Hence he says to Abraham, Gen. xv. 1. *I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.* He is a full Fountain of all good: So that we may possess all things in him *. Hence the apostle speaks of himself and other ministers of Christ, *As having nothing, and yet possessing all things (q).* 2. A strong inclination to let out of his fulness, and to do good on all occasions. *Thou art good, and dost good (r),* says the psalmist. As God is all-sufficient in himself, so he is communicative of his riches to his creatures, and most of all to his own children; as the sun communicates light, and a fountain poureth out waters.

Concerning this relative goodness of God, observe, 1. It comprehends all his relative perfections. When Moses desired to see the glory of God, he tells him, *I will make all my goodness pass before thee (s).* And by his goodness, we are to understand the train of his relative perfections springing from his goodness; as appears from the proclamation of his name, which was the performance of that he had promised (t). All the acts of divine grace, mercy, long-suffering, &c. are the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names, according to the objects about which it is exercised. When it supplies the indigent, it is *bounty*; when it relieves the miserable, it is *mercy*; when it confers blessings on the unworthy, it is *grace*; when it bears long with rebellious sinners, it is *long-suffering*; when it bestows blessings on them to whom he hath obliged himself by promise, it is *truth*; and when it succours the innocent, and, by just punishment, restrains these evils that are destructive to men, it is *justice* and *righteousness*. *Obs.* 2. It renders his other attributes amiable and delightful to us. Whatever comfort they yield to the hearts of believers, it is all owing to his goodness. This makes his wisdom contrive, and his power to act for us, and veils his holiness from affrighting us. It is this attribute that sets the rest on work for our good. So that this is the most pleasant perfection of the divine nature. *Obs.* 3. It is the great inviting attribute. We admire God for his other attributes and perfections: But this allures and draws in our hearts to him.

For

(p) Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

* *Possidet possidentem omnia.*

(q) 2 Cor. vi. 10.

(r) Psal. cxix. 68. (s) Exod. xxxiii. 19. (t) Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

For this we love him, and make our addressees to him. His goodness is a strong invitation to come to him for all we need. The great ground of all our converse with him, is that he is a good God. Hence an old father says †, *The chief name by which we conceive of God is his goodness.*

(2.) God's relative goodness may be considered, as it is let out to the creatures in various blessings and benefits; called by some, his *imparted goodness*. In this sense, *the earth is full of his goodness, and of his riches* (u). This the psalmist admires, *O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men* (x)! There is no creature in the world wholly destitute of all marks of the goodness of God. He pronounced every thing he had made to be *very good*: And, says the apostle, *every creature of God is good* (y). Every creature hath some communications from him, some footstep of divine goodness upon it.

Yet all do not partake equally of his goodness. He is good to all, but not in the same kind of blessings, nor in the same measure and degree. He hath conferred the light of reason upon man, and not upon the beasts. To some men he is more sparing, to others more liberal. To some he gives common blessings only, to others special and saving blessings. To some he gives a greater measure of gifts or graces, to others a lesser measure. He sends the gospel to some nations, and not to others. The causes of this variety and inequality may be, 1. The better to manifest the variety and fulness of his goodness; and what an inexhaustible fountain he is. It was not possible that any one creature could receive all the communications of divine goodness; therefore it is communicated to more, and that with great variety. 2. For the perfection of the universe. Though it had been better for some creatures themselves, that the goodness of God had advanced them to some higher degree of being; yet it had not been better for the universe. As in the natural body, though there be many members of less excellency than the head; yet if we consider them in their several functions, their inferior goodness is necessary for the good of the whole: So it is in the body politic; and in the mystical body of Christ (z). And so it is in the universe; there is a variety in the communications of the

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Qq

divine

† *Bonum est primum & potissimum nomen Dei.* Damascen.

(u) Psal. civ. 24. & xxxiii. 5. (x) Psal. xxxi. 19. (y) Gen. i. 31. 1 Tim. iv. 4. (z) See 1 Cor. xii. 14, 26.

divine goodness to the creatures, that they might have their distinct usefulness to the common end. 3. For the greater beauty of the universe. As the great variety of herbs, plants, and flowers, contributes much to the beauty of a garden; so the variety and inequality of the creatures is the ornament of the world, and perfects the beauty of it. 4. To manifest his sovereignty in the free disposal of his own goods. Had he been alike good to all, it would have looked like a necessary efflux of his nature; but by the inequality, the freedom of his goodness, which is the glory of it, is made manifest. 5. This inequality is a part of his goodness to man. Had he advanced other creatures to a higher degree of being, man would have wanted creatures of an inferior nature for his convenience; and much of that goodness which he hath communicated to man would have been hid, and never have been put forth for want of materials to work upon. 6. The wisdom of God having once settled the creatures in their several beings, there must needs be an inequality in communicating his goodness to them, because of their different capacities. The creature would sink, if God did pour out all his goodness upon it; therefore he communicates no more of his goodness to any creature than its capacity will admit.

From all which it appears, that it makes nothing against the goodness of God, that he is not equally good to all; seeing both his goodness and his wisdom is much seen in this inequality; and his wisdom is the rule of dispensing his goodness. He is sovereign Lord of his own gifts, and therefore, in the distribution of them, must be allowed to act according to his own wisdom and pleasure, and not according to the fancies of foolish creatures.

Third, I come to shew that God is matchless in his goodness; none can compare with him in it. In this sense our blessed Lord said to that young man, *There is none good but one, that is God (a)*. There is none good like him; none good in comparison of him. All our goodness will appear no goodness, being compared with his. If *the heavens*, which are the purest part of the world, *are not clean in his sight, how much more abominable and filthy is man (b)?* None but God merits the name of good. He is good in a more excellent way than any of the creatures: For,

1. He is essentially good; Good by his essence, and not by a superadded gift. The goodness of God, and the goodness of the creature differ, as a vessel whose substance is gold, differs

(a) Mat. xix. 17. (b) Job xv. 15, 16.

fers from another that is only overlaid with gold. The goodness of God is not a quality in him, but a nature; not a habit added to his essence, but his very essence itself. Even Hierocles, a pagan, owned * that God is *essentially good*. He is not only good, but Goodness itself.

2. He is originally good: good of himself, and from no other. The goodness of God hath no spring: it depends on no other: He hath it in and of himself †. And all the goodness that is in the creatures, is but a stream from this fountain. Hence he is called *the fountain of living waters*, Jer. ii. 13. There is no goodness but by him, and from him. He hath made every thing good; but nothing made him good. He is the ocean of goodness, whence all the goodness that is in the creatures is derived.

3. He is immutably good. *The goodness of God endureth continually* (c). He cannot cease to be good. As *the Father of lights*, there is *no variableness in him* (d). His goodness cannot be augmented nor diminished. He can neither become better nor worse than he is: Not better, because he is infinitely good, as we shall hear; nor worse, because he is essentially good, good by his essence.

4. He is perfectly good: So good, that there is in him no mixture of any thing that can be called not good: So good, that he possesseth whatever is comely, excellent, or desirable. All that is truly good, is to be found in him. In the creatures there are different kinds of goodness; but all kinds are eminently summed up in God. Other things are good in their kind; but God hath a good of all kinds eminently in his nature. He is all good, as well as Almighty.

5. He is communicatively good. His goodness is communicative of itself. He acts according to his nature: He is good, and doth good (e). God is not an enclosed, pent-up goodness, like a spring shut up, or a fountain sealed: But he is a fountain of goodness, *a well of living, or springing water* (f). He is not of a niggardly envious nature. Yet he is most free in the communications of his goodness. He was under no necessity to communicate his goodness to any thing without himself, because under no necessity to give a being to any thing

* In Pythag. Carm.

† *Ipse bono suo bonus est, non aliunde participato bono: Ipse non eguit a quo bonus fieret, sed eguerunt illa cetera, ut fierent bona.*

Aug. de Trin. L. 8. C. 3.

(c) Psal. lii. 1.

(d) James i. 17.

(e) Psal. cxix. 68.

(f) Cant. iv. 15.

thing without him. In this sense, though he be necessarily good in his nature, yet he is free in the communications of his goodness. Again, having purposed to impart his goodness to something without him, he was free to chuse this or that, and to give a being to what things he pleased, as the subject of it. And although, having purposed to create them, it is necessary he should make them good, because of his end in creating them, which is his own glory; yet he was free as to the manner and measure of communication. He is not necessarily communicative of his goodness, as the sun is of its light, that enlightens all indifferently, without any variation or distinction; for he is an understanding agent, and is absolutely free to dispense his goodness, in what measures and methods his infinite wisdom finds meet for his own glory. Hence he says, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion* (g).

6. He is infinitely good: good in the highest degree: good above all degrees. The goodness of God is boundless, and knows no limits: It is as infinite as his essence. It is circumscribed by no limits, though the exercise thereof is limited by his will. Hence he is said to be *abundant in goodness*; and we read of *the riches of his goodness* (h). Though God should make ten thousand million of worlds full of rational creatures; yet they could never exhaust the riches and treasures of goodness that are in him. All created goodness is but a sip to this fountain, a drop to this ocean. Hence,

7. He is incomprehensibly good. The goodness of God is incomprehensible and inconceivable. It is a *great goodness* (i): But how great, cannot be conceived, much less expressed. Therefore the prophet cries out, *How great is his goodness!* His goodness infinitely surpasseth the reach of our capacity, and is to be admired and adored, but cannot be comprehended by any created understanding. It is great, in regard of all sorts of dimensions. We may apply to the goodness of God, what the apostle says of the love of Christ, *O the height, and depth, and breadth, and length of the goodness of God* (k)!

S E R M O N XXXVII.

Fourth, **I** Proceed to shew, Wherein the goodness of God is manifested. Indeed the manifestations he hath given of it are admirably great. And,

1. The

(g) Rom. ix. 15. (h) Exod. xxxiv. 6. Rom. ii. 4. (i) Psal. cxlv. 7. (k) Eph. iii. 19.

1. The goodness of God is manifest in creation. There is no perfection of the divine nature so eminently visible in the whole book of the creation as this is. Here the goodness of God glitters gloriously. He made all things *very good* (a). It was great goodness to communicate being to some things without himself, and to extract such a multitude of things from the depths of nothing; and to give life and breath to some of these creatures. But the divine goodness is manifest especially in the creation of man: In endowing him with choicer prerogatives than other creatures. What is man's body and soul, but like a curiously carved cabinet, with a rich and precious jewel inclosed in it? Again, the goodness of God is manifest in making man after his own image; in furnishing the world with so many creatures for his use; in giving him dominion over the work of his hands; in entering into covenant with him, and furnishing him with grace and strength to keep his covenant.

2. The goodness of God is gloriously manifested in our redemption by Christ. The whole of redemption is wrapt up in that one expression, *Good-will towards men* (b). O what astonishing goodness was it for God to give his only begotten Son to the death for such vile rebels and enemies as we all are by nature? The goodness of God, under the name of his love, is rendered as the only cause of our redemption by Christ. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son* (c). This *So* is inexpressible; a *So* that all the angels in heaven cannot conceive or understand the dimensions of. God gave Christ for us, to commend his love, and to set it off with an admirable lustre. *God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (d). O what an expensive goodness was this! What cost was infinite goodness at for our redemption!

3. The goodness of God is manifest in the covenant of grace. What admirable goodness was it, that God did not hold us all to the impossible terms of the first covenant, but would enter into a second covenant with some of the lost posterity of Adam? That an infinitely blessed God, who had no need of us; an offended God, he against whom we rebelled; an infinitely glorious Majesty, should enter into covenant with such vile wretches as we are: O how astonishing is this! And then, consider what an excellent covenant this is; *a better covenant* than the covenant of works. It is a *full* covenant,

(a) Gen. i. 31. (b) Luke x. 14. (c) John iii. 16. (d) Rom. v. 8.

nant, ordered in all things (e). It is a free covenant: nothing is required of us in it, but what is graciously promised; even faith itself, which supplies the place of a condition required of us, is the free gift of God. It is an everlasting covenant, that can never be made void and null. It is a sure covenant: All the mercies thereof are sure mercies (f), made sure to believers in Christ. Now, that God should enter into a better covenant with apostate sinners, after the first was broken; this is admirable goodness. Again, the goodness of God is manifest in confirming the covenant by his solemn oath; and in sealing it by the sacraments, for the confirmation of our faith; and in the sweet and gentle methods of his dealing with sinners, for bringing them into the bond of the covenant. O how affectionately doth he invite you? How earnestly doth he plead with you? What pressing motives and arguments doth he use? And how loth is he to give over, and take a refusal?

4. The goodness of God is manifest in his conduct and government. Here we must distinguish a two-fold goodness of God, common and special.

(1.) Common goodness; which is common to all the creatures. *God is good to all.* All the creatures taste of his bounty. *The earth is full of his goodness (g).* He is good to the creatures in preserving and providing for them. *He preserveth man and beast.* And, *the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season. He openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing (h).* Thus he is good, even to the brute creatures. So the psalmist tells us, *He giveth to the beast his food; and to the young ravens which cry: And the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.* And having spoken of the beasts and fishes, great and small, he adds, *These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather: Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good (i).* But especially he is good to man. Even the mercies of his common providence are witnesses of his bounty and goodness. Hence the apostle says, *He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (k).* He daily covers our tables, and fills our cups for us. Thus he is good even to the worst of men;

(e) Heb. viii. 6. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. (f) Isa. lv. 5. (g) Psal. cxlv. 9. and xxxiii. 5. (h) Psal. xxxvi. 6. Psal. cxlv. 15, 16. (i) Psal. cxlvii. 9. Psal. civ. 21, 27, 28. (k) Acts xiv. 17.

men *; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust (l). O what cause have we to cry out, even in consideration of this common goodness of God, *What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him (m)?* His goodness, even in common blessings, is wonderful and astonishing, considering his incomprehensible greatness, and our abominable vileness and unworthiness.

(2.) There is God's special goodness to his own children, whom he blesteth with spiritual and saving benefits. For the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him: And, Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart (n). His goodness to his own is wonderful, in pardoning their iniquities, healing their spiritual diseases, sanctifying their natures, hearing and answering their prayers, bearing with their infirmities, accepting their imperfect services, supporting and delivering them in temptations, solving their doubts, directing and guiding them in their difficulties, &c.

Particularly, his goodness to his own children is, 1. manifold. There is his pitying and sparing goodness, supporting, relieving, strengthening, quickening, and comforting goodness. Hence the psalmist cries out, *Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works, which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. And, How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God? How great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand (o).* 2. It is an abundant goodness, let out in an abundant measure, to fill and satisfy the souls of his people. Hence is that invitation; *Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved (p).* There is enough to fill the most enlarged and strong appetite. *He fills the hungry with good things: And, He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness (q).* Sometimes he lets out of his goodness to his people, in a more than ordinary measure, so that their cup runneth over (r). God hath promised this: *I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness; and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord (s).* And his people

* *Ecce foeleratis sol oritur, & Piratis patent Maria.*

Sen. de Ira. L. 4. C. 26.

(l) Mat. v. 45. (m) Psal. viii. 4. (n) Lam. iii. 25. Psal. lxxiii. 1. (o) Psal. xl. 5. and cxxxix. 17, 18. (p) Cant. v. 1. (q) Luke i. 53. Psal. cvii. 2. (r) Psal. xxiii. 5. (s) Jer. xxxi. 14.

ple are sometimes confident of it: *We shall be satisfied, say they, with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple* (t). 3. It is sweet and refreshing. Hence we read of *tasting of his goodness* (u). It is sweeter to believers, than honey, and all things that can be desired. It affords sweeter satisfaction than *marrow and fatness* (x). And this adds much to the sweetness of it, that all is conveyed to them through a Mediator, God-man; all runs through the channel of his precious blood. 4. It is suitable goodness: Suited to all their wants and necessities. For hardness, he gives tenderness of heart; for deadness, life and quickening; for impenitency, repentance; for drooping, comfort; *the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness* (y); for poverty, fine gold tried in the fire; for nakedness, the white raiment of Christ's righteousness; eye-salve to cure our blindness; the bread and water of life, to satisfy our hunger and thirst. Thus, his goodness is wonderfully suited to all the necessities of his people. 5. It is seasonable goodness. It is imparted as our several exigencies require. It is most let out, when his people have most need of it, and when they are most put to it. There is *very present help in trouble, and grace to help in time of need* (z). Have not believers in Christ manifold experiences of this? 6. It is durable goodness. *The goodness of God endureth continually* (a). His goodness, to his people, is lasting; yea, everlasting. It runs in a constant course toward them: And the blessings and benefits he bestows upon them, are such as neither devils nor men can deprive them of. *Their joy no man taketh from them. Here is that good part, which shall not be taken away from them* (b). To conclude, all God's gracious purposes toward his people, all the blessed fruits of electing love, all the means and helps that are necessary to everlasting glory, all things pertaining to life and godliness, are the effects of God's special goodness to them. Hence the apostle prays for the believing Thessalonians, that God would *fulfil in and for them all the good pleasure of his goodness* (c). And to them common mercies are given in love, and with an aim at their good. *No good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly* (d).

Thus we see that the admirable goodness of God is confirmed by the experience of the saints. Yea, sometimes they have

(t) Psal. lxxv. 4. (u) 1 Pet. ii. 3. (x) Psal. lxxiii. 5. (y) Isa. lxi. 3. (z) Psal. xlv. 1. Heb. iv. 16.

(a) Psal. lii. 1. (b) John xvi. 22. Luke x. 42. (c) 2 Thess. i. 11. (d) Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

have such sensible experiences of the divine goodness, as afford a sweetness and refreshment to their souls, beyond what any tongue is able to express. 1. I say, God sometimes lets out his goodness to them in a sensible manner: They have the sense of it in their own souls; so that they freely own and acknowledge his great goodness to them, and can say with the psalmist, *Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.* Orig. *Thou hast done good to thy servant.* And again, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.* And elsewhere, *O my soul, the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee (e).* And the spouse often acknowledges Christ's goodness to her (f). The Lord is pleased sometimes to deal thus with his people, to assure them of his love to them; to enflame their love toward him; to strengthen their hearts and hands for duty; to prepare them for, and support them under great trials and afflictions; to confirm their hopes of glory, by some foretastes and pledges of the happiness above; and that others may be encouraged, from their imparted experiences, to come to God, and to wait on him. 2. The sense of God's special goodness is a sweet and soul-refreshing thing. The psalmist, from the sweet sense he had of it, invites others, *O taste and see that the Lord is good.* And the spouse imparts her experience of this: *I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.* And the psalmist cries out, *How sweet are thy words unto my taste? Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth (g).* It is more sweet than all earthly comforts; more exhilarating and refreshing. *His love is better than wine (h).* It is so sweet that it sweetens all other enjoyments: It is like sauce to make other lawful comforts relish the better. It is so sweet that it makes every condition of life sweet: It is like sugar and honey to allay the bitterness of any cup of affliction. It is so sweet, that it makes duties and ordinances sweet: And it mars the taste and relish of other comforts. 3. Such sweet experiences of the special goodness of God are inexpressible. Hence the psalmist cries out, *O taste and see that the Lord is good (i).* As if he had said, I cannot express to you what a good God he hath been to me, nor how sweet and refreshing these experiences are that I have had of his goodness; but O that you would come and make trial by your own experience.

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R r

The

(e) Psal. cxix. 65. Psal. ciii. 1, 5. Psal. cxvi. 7. (f) Cant. i. 4. and ii. 4. (g) Psal. xxxiv. 8. Cant. ii. 3. Psal. cxix. 103. (h) Cant. i. 2. (i) Psal. xxxiv. 8.

The sweet sense of the divine goodness is best known by experience. The saints do therefore cry out with admiration, *How excellent is thy loving kindness, O Lord? And How sweet are thy words unto my taste (k)?* I cannot tell how sweet. When God is pleased to let out his goodness to his people in a sensible manner, they do then feel more than any tongue can express. Hence we read of *joy unspeakable and full of glory*; and of *peace that passeth all understanding (l)*. Sometimes they are made to cry out, *How great is his goodness!* They cannot express how great; but they admire and wonder at it. They could never think that so much goodness was to be enjoyed, as now they find and enjoy in him.

I add, that how much goodness soever is *laid out* upon the children of God, yet there is much more goodness *laid up* for them. This the psalmist admires: *O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee (m)!* Here I shall speak a little to these three things.

First, Where it is laid up. There is great goodness *laid up* for the children of God, 1. In his eternal decree and purpose of love: It is laid up in the heart of God from everlasting. From all eternity he set his love on them, and purposed to manifest his love by various inestimable blessings: so that all the goodness he lets out upon them is *according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself (n)*. But how much soever he lets out, yet there is much more in his heart. The womb of his decree is still pregnant with more goodness. 2. In the promises of the covenant. There is a difference between God's purpose and promise. A purpose is secret in the heart; a promise open and manifest. God's promises are declarations of his purpose. Now, the promises are very full; the covenant is *ordered in all things*. They are *exceeding great and precious promises (o)*. They are a rich mine of spiritual treasures. There are laid up all things needful, for soul and body, for time and eternity. 3. In Christ. All covenant blessings are laid up in him for them that believe on his name. He is their treasury and storehouse. *In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*: And, *it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell (p)*. There is in him an all fulness, and a fulness inexhaustible, and a fulness suited to the various wants and necessities of the souls of his people. As the prodigal said,

In

(k) Psal. xxxvi. 7. and cxix. 103. (l) 1 Pet. i. 8. Phil. iv. 8.
 (m) Psal. xxxii. 19. (n) Eph. i. 9. (o) 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. 2 Pet. i.
 4. (p) Col. ii. 3. and i. 19.

In my father's house there is bread enough and to spare (q) : So, in Christ there is no lack of any thing you need. And how much soever you have received, there is still more to be had. Christ is as full as ever; he is *the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever (r)*. 4. In heaven. Of which afterward.

Second, What this *laying up* imports. This phrase, God's *laying up* great goodness for his people, imports, 1. That this goodness is precious. They are precious things that men lay up in a treasury or cabinet: So, the blessings God hath laid up for his children are very precious. The psalmist cries out, *How excellent (Orig. how precious) is thy loving-kindness, O God. The promises are exceeding precious (s)*. The least measure of grace is more precious than all treasures. As this goodness is precious in itself, so it is purchased with the precious blood of Christ. 2. That there is great plenty and abundance of it. In a treasury men lay up abundantly. So here, there are riches and treasures of goodness laid up for the children of God. There are blessings of all sorts and kinds; who can count or reckon them up? And each of them in great abundance. There is enough to fill and satisfy the souls of his people (t), There is enough to fill up all their faculties, and to make their hearts run over. 3. That it is a hidden goodness. *Their life is hid with Christ in God (u)*. And, (1.) It is hid from the carnal world. Grace is not seen, though the effects thereof do appear. *The King's daughter is all glorious within (x)*. Their dignities and privileges are a great secret to carnal men. Strangers do not intermeddle with their joy; that is, they do not understand it. Their comforts are spiritual, known by feeling, rather than by report. *Their peace passeth all understanding*. And we read of the *hidden manna* which they feed upon (y). (2.) It is hid, in a great measure, from themselves. Their blessings and privileges are so great, that they cannot understand or make language of them, but are stricken with admiration. And they have not now an heart to conceive the glory intended for them. Therefore the Spirit of God, in scripture, is pleased to *lisp* with us, and to condescend to our weak capacity, by expressing heavenly things under earthly similitudes. 4. That it is most sure and safe. Men lay up precious things for greater security, that none may come at them: So the blessings God hath provided for his people are surely kept.

Devils

(q) Luke xv. 17. (r) Heb. xiii. 8. (s) Psal. xxxvi. 7. 2. Pet. i. 4. (t) Psal. xxxvi. 8. and lxiv. 5. (u) Col. iii. 3. (x) Psal. xlv. 13. (y) Phil. iv. 7. Rev. ii. 17.

Devils and men cannot rob them of their portion : They cannot reach it to take it away. Their *life is hid with Christ in God* (z). It is hid, not only in point of obscurity, having a vail upon it, so that it is not discernible by carnal men; but also in point of security, being kept out of hazard, and maintained by an invisible hand. Their *joy no man takes from them* (a). Particularly, what is laid up for them in heaven is surely kept. The *incorruptible and undefiled inheritance is reserved in heaven for them* (b). Hence our Lord exhorts us, to *lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal* (c). 5. That it shall be made forthcoming for them, as their necessities and exigencies require. Men use to lay up in store for a time of need; and in their straits and necessities they have recourse to it for supply. So here, there are graces, blessings and comforts, laid up against a time of need, for the children of God; and when that time comes, they are made forthcoming for them. There is *grace to help in time of need* (d).

Third, Why is so much goodness laid up for the children of God? Why is it not all laid out upon them? 1. Because of their incapacity. They are but weak vessels, and of small capacity, not able to receive and contain at once all that goodness that God hath to communicate to them. These refreshing experiences they sometimes have of the goodness of God, are like new wine put into crazy bottles, and would certainly overpower them, if they were of any long continuance, or communicated in great abundance. 2. Because of their insufficiency to manage all that God hath to bestow. Man at first got his stock in his own hand, but he wasted all, and played the bankrupt: Therefore God will not trust us with it again. As parents lay up for their children, till they come to years, and can guide well: So doth God with his children. In this life we are but minors in this respect. Our stock would not be sure, if it were in our own hand; we would soon misguide all; as the prodigal wasted his substance with riotous living. 3. To keep his children in a needy dependence on him by faith and prayer. There is so much goodness laid up for them, that they may have many errands to the throne of grace, and much occasion for employing Christ, and making use of him by faith. 4. To hearten them, when they have straits, miseries, and distresses in their view and prospect. There are times of need before their hand, a time of affliction,

or

(z) Col. iii. 3.

(a) John xvi. 22. (b) 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. (c) Matth. vi. 20. (d) Heb. iv. 16.

or persecution, or temptation, or desertion: But there is great goodness laid up for them; therefore they may take heart; there is enough laid up for time to come.

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

✓ 5. **T**HE goodness of God will be most signally manifested at the great day, when he will bountifully reward his people. It is in consideration of this especially that the psalmist cries out, *O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee (a)*. It is laid up in heaven. And, O, who can tell how great goodness is laid up there! For *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (b)*. There is much goodness laid out upon believers in this life; but there is much more laid up for them in heaven. God communicates his goodness to them in this life, but scantily and sparingly; so that their most refreshing experiences of it are but *the first fruits (c)*, some small beginning of the glory that is to come. All that they get here, is but a taste or sip of his goodness: But in heaven they shall have the full draughts, even as much as they can hold. Hence it is that the saints *long and groan earnestly* for their heavenly state *(d)*. All that they get here doth not satisfy their longing, but rather provoke their appetite for the full feast of glory. As the most eminent saints in this life are but narrow-mouthed vessels and of small capacity; so the means in and by which God communicates his goodness to them, are like narrow conduits from a full fountain: the ordinances cannot convey all the goodness of God to them. But in heaven, God will be *all in all (e)*, and will do his work by himself. There, the narrowness of the means shall not straiten him, nor the weakness of the vessel hinder him, to communicate his goodness fully. Here we enjoy God but at second or third hand, in ordinances and providences: but there, God shall communicate himself immediately, and therefore in a greater latitude and fulness than now. Here we get a little in this ordinance, and a little in that ordinance; though that little be sometimes as much as we can hold: But in heaven, God will be *all in all*, and we shall be filled

(a) Psal. xxxi. 19. (b) 1 Cor. ii. 9. (c) Rom. viii. 23.
 (d) Psal. xxxiv. 8. 1 Pet. ii. 3. Rom. viii. 23. 2 Cor. v. 2, 4.
 (e) 1 Cor. xv. 28.

filled with all the fulness of God. There every vessel shall be filled to the brim, and we shall hunger and thirst no more.

Thus I have shewed you wherein the admirable greatness of the divine goodness is manifested. Now, even God's manifested and imparted goodness is incomprehensible, considering the great multitude and variety of objects, and the variety of goodness to every one of them. There are *riches of goodness* (f), let out even to obstinate and hardened sinners. But especially his goodness to his own is such that no created understanding is able to conceive the greatness of it, so that it will be matter of eternal admiration to angels and saints. Yet all the manifestations ever God gave of his goodness, are but imperfect shadows of that goodness that is in himself. Even when he hath communicated all that goodness this world is capable of, there is still enough behind, sufficient to enrich innumerable worlds. All possible creatures are not capable of exhausting, or in the least diminishing, the wealth and treasures of infinite goodness.

Fifthly, I come, in the last place, to make application of this doctrine.

Use 1. For reproof. To them that abuse the divine goodness. Now, the goodness of God is abused, 1. By forgetfulness of his benefits. We all need that caution, *Forget not all his benefits* (g). The remembrance of them soon wears out of our minds: As it is said of the children of Israel, *They forgot God their Saviour, who had done great things in Egypt* (h). We may remember his benefits notionally; but we forget them practically, when the deep affecting sense of the goodness of God in them, wears off our hearts. 2. By murmuring and repining, when our lot in the world doth not please us. Murmuring ariseth from an unthankful frame of spirit. We murmur under want, because we forget the goodness that we enjoy. And all murmuring charges God with cruelty, and a want of goodness, and therefore is most dishonourable to him. 3. By taking liberty to sin, because of his goodness. When men, under a great affluence of earthly comforts, take liberty to live as they list, and wax wanton against God; this is a horrid abuse, as if God had bestowed so many blessings on men, to hire them to be the more rebellious. God complains of Israel, *She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal* (i). They employed his blessings in the service of their idols.

(f) Rom. ii. 4.

(g) Psal. ciii. 2.

(h) Psal. cvi. 21.

(i) Hof. ii. 8.

idols. Many abuse riches to pride and prodigality, and plenty to sloth and ease, and the bounty of God to luxury and sensuality. How base and brutish is it, thus to kick against our feeder? O, what wickedness is it, to turn that into fuel for lust, which should be an incentive to love and duty?

Use 2. For expostulation with sinners, who turn their back on a good God, and seek their happiness in the enjoyment of other things. Seeing God is infinitely and incomprehensibly good, the chief good; then what folly and madness is it for any of you, to run to the creatures to make up your happiness? This is to *forsake the fountain of living waters, and to hew you out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (k)*. O that God would discover to you the vanity and emptiness of all created comforts and enjoyments, and his own fulness and all-sufficiency. He is indeed a full and sufficient good. To your happiness there needs no more but God: Therefore it is unaccountable folly for you to seek to make up your happiness elsewhere. At last you will curse the day, wherein you took your hearts off God, and set them on other things besides him.

Use 3. For comfort to believers in Christ. It is great ground of comfort in all conditions of life, that your God is an infinitely good God. O, what may you not expect from infinite Goodness? In all your straits, you shall find him to be a good God. In times of public danger, you are full of fears what shall become of you and yours: But what need you fear from the conduct of infinite Goodness? Your God is infinitely good, and will surely be a good God to you, whatever way the world go. Because he is good, therefore he will be a refuge for you in times of danger: *For the Lord is good; a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him (l)*. When you are in the dark about your duty, and know not what to do, then you may expect conduct and direction from your good God. *Good and upright is the Lord; says the psalmist; Therefore will he teach sinners in the way (m)*. When you feel the burden of sin, and are filled with apprehensions and fears of deserved wrath, then may you expect pardon and forgiveness from infinite goodness: *For the Lord is good, and ready to forgive (n)*. When the sins of your youth stare you in the face, then may the consideration of infinite goodness encourage you. Hence the psalmist prays, *Remember not the sins of my youth,*

nor

(k) Jer. ii. 13. (l) Nah. i. 7. (m) Psal. xxv. 8. (n) Psal. lxxxvi. 5.

nor my transgressions : according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord (o). Once more, when wicked men plot and contrive your ruin, then remember that you have a good God. Hence the psalmist says, to wicked Doeg, *Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually* (p). Thus *, your faith may triumph, in all your straits and distresses, in the sense of the divine goodness. And, O, how comfortable is it, that the goodness of God is boundless and bottomless? You need not fear the wasting of it, nor any weariness in him to bestow it. This stock can never be spent; and infinite Goodness can never become niggardly. There is still an infinite ocean in him, to refresh you; and streams as full as ever, to supply you.

Use 4. For exhortation. In several branches.

✓ Exhort. 1. Labour to get a deep sense of the goodness of God upon your hearts. This will be of great advantage to you. It will quicken you to duty, and encourage your addresses to God, and enlarge your desires and expectations. It will promote thankfulness, and humble you for your unkindness and ingratitude to God. Therefore labour to have your hearts deeply possessed with a sense of the divine goodness. Get and entertain large thoughts of it. It greatly concerns you to look to it, what picture you draw of God in your minds. O, do not entertain hard thoughts of him, as if he were harsh and severe, or of a niggardly and envious nature. No, he is a good God. Meditate much upon his goodness, as it is displayed in all his works, and especially in the glorious work of redemption; and let your thoughts be deep and ponderous. Observe how freely God communicates his goodness every day, even to the most undeserving and ill-deserving creatures. This is work both pleasant and profitable. *Whoso is wise, and will observe those things; even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord* (q).

Exhort. 2. Is God infinitely God? Then let it be your great desire and business to enjoy him. Many say, *who will shew us any good* (r)? But here is the most desirable object. God is the purest, best, and most universal good †. Particularly,

(o) Psal. xxv. 7. (p) Psal. lii. 1.

* *Nec pudet vivere, nec piget mori, quia bonum habemus Dominum.* Ambr.

(q) Psal. cvii. 43. (r) Psal. iv. 6.

† *Quicquid præter Deum est, dulce non est: Quicquid mihi vult dare Dominus meus, auferat totum, & se mihi det.*

Aug Epist. Capit. 36.

larly, 1. He is the chief good. What good there is in other things, cometh from him: Therefore it is infinitely better and greater in him, than it is in them. 2. He is an infinite good. In him there is an ocean of goodness. Besides God there is nothing we can desire or aim at: if we enjoy him, we enjoy all that good that can make us eternally happy. There is infinitely more good in him, than in all temporal good things; and there is enough in him to preponderate all the evils you can suffer for his sake. 3. He is a plentiful and sufficient good: *God all-sufficient* (s); sufficient for the necessities of this life, and of that which is to come. You are poor empty creatures, but in him is all fulness. In him you may have all your wants supplied. You need no more but God. There is a want annexed to all other things; but God alone sufficeth. 4. He is a contenting and satisfying good. In him you may have full content and satisfaction, begun here, and perfected hereafter. When you set your hearts on other things, still you are uneasy; for these things may vex, but cannot satisfy: But God alone is enough, to content, satisfy, and delight your soul. He is sufficient to his own happiness, how much more to the happiness of a poor creature? O there is enough in him to make your heart run over. 5. He is a durable, yea, an eternal good. All earthly things are, like Jonah's gourd, fading flowers; and, at death, you must take your everlasting farewell of them: But God is a permanent good. Your happiness in him will still remain, when all other comforts fail.

O then, come and set your hearts on God, and make it your great business to enjoy him. And, for this end, 1. Study to know God, especially as he hath revealed himself in Christ. Right apprehensions of the absolute perfection of his nature, of his matchless excellency and glory, would have a mighty engaging influence upon your heart. 2. Improve you experiences of the instability, vanity, and emptiness of all created enjoyments: And persuade yourselves of this, that there is nothing that robs God of your heart, but will prove an occasion of grief and sorrow to you, sooner or later. 3. Nourish good thoughts of God; and especially get a deep sense of his goodness in Christ. O he is a good God; and all that ever tried him found him to be good beyond what any heart can conceive. 4. Be much in prayer. Pray much for *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (t). And pray for the drawing power of grace, to incline and de-

VOL. I. N^o. 3.

S f

termine

(s) Gen. xvii. 1.

(t) 2 Cor. iv. 6.

termine your heart to a deliberate and resolute choice of God in Christ for your chief and all-sufficient good. Pray, with Solomon, *The Lord our God be with us—that he may incline our hearts to him* (u).

Exhort. 3. I invite you all to a taste of God's special goodness. *O taste and see that the Lord is good* (x). The goodness of God to his own is better felt than expressed: Therefore do not rest content with a bare hearsay; but get a taste, an inward experimental knowledge of the goodness of God in Christ.

To excite and quicken you to this, consider, 1. That a taste of the special goodness of God is a great blessing. For, (1.) A gracious experience of the divine goodness will give you such acquaintance with it, that you will find it to exceed all that can be spoken of it; so that you will be ready to say, as the Queen of Sheba on another occasion, that the one half was not told you. (2.) A taste will provoke your appetite. It will enlarge your desires, and quicken your endeavours after more. You will, *as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious* (y). (3.) A taste of the special goodness of God will be to you a pawn and pledge of the glory to come: For here we get but a taste of that, the full draughts whereof are reserved for heaven. As these tastes are sweet in themselves, and in regard of present sense and feeling; so they are sweet in the reflection, and as to that which is to follow, you may certainly expect greater things after them. 2. God is most willing that the vilest sinners among you should taste of his special goodness. He is willing and ready to communicate his goodness to you in a gracious way. How affectionately doth he invite you to come to him for this end? *O taste and see that the Lord is good. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, &c. Hearken diligently unto me—Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness* (z). And how doth he bewail your wilful refusal of his goodness? *O that my people had hearkened unto me. Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments* (a). Others have had sweet and refreshing experiences of the goodness of God; and why may not you also? They were as deep in want, misery and distress as you; and they were as vile and unworthy as you; and God is as good now as formerly, as liberal and bountiful as ever: Why then may not you have the like success that they had?

But

(u) 1 Kings viii. 57, 58. (x) Psal. xxxiv. 8. (y) 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.
(z) Isa. lv. 1, 2. (a) Psal. lxxxi. 13. Isa. xlviii. 18.

But what shall we do that we may taste of his special goodness? 1. Renounce all iniquity. The Lord is a good God: But he is not good in a gracious way to them that live and go on in sin. The psalmist blesses him for his goodness: *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation (b)*: But mark what follows, *But God shall wound the head of his enemies: and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses*. 2. Come to God by Christ: For Christ is the blessed channel through which all God's special goodness is communicated to the souls of the elect. Receive Christ, and close with him on his own terms. It is in him only that God is well pleased. 3. Trust in God. *O taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man that trusteth in him*. The goodness of God is laid up for them that fear him, but wrought for them that trust in him (c). It is laid out and communicated upon special acts of trust. There is great goodness laid up for believers in the promises: Rest and rely on God through Christ for the accomplishment of them. 4. Get a large and strong appetite; a gracious hunger and thirst after the grace and goodness of God: For, *he filleth the hungry with good things: and he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness (d)*. 5. Be diligent, unwearied, and importunate, in seeking God; and wait on him in his own way: For *the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him (e)*. 6. Attend the public ordinances: For these are the conduit-pipes through which the special goodness of God is communicated to the souls of his people. *We shall be satisfied, say they, with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple (f)*. 7. Study to imitate God in his goodness; to be good as he is good. The psalmist prays, *Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good (g)*. God delights to communicate his goodness most to those whom he loves best; and he loves them best who are most like himself. 8. Study sincerity and uprightness of heart: For God will *do good to them that are upright in their hearts (h)*. Let it be your great business to have your hearts, through grace, right with God in duties and ordinances. And study uprightness in your walk: For *no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly (i)*. God appeals to the consciences of his people, *Do not my words do good* to

(b) Psal. lxxviii. 19, 21. (c) Matth. iii. 17. Psal. xxxiv. 8. and xxxi. 19. (d) Luke i. 53. Psal. cvii. 9. (e) Lam. iii. 25. (f) Psal. lxxv. 4. (g) Psal. cxxv. 4. (h) Psal. cxxv. 4. (i) Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

to him that walketh uprightly (k)? Surely, if you walked more uprightly with God, you would reap more benefit by the word and sacraments.

S E R M O N XXXIX.

Exhort. 4. **L**ABOUR to recount the goodness of God to you. Look back on the several periods and passages of your life, and consider what experiences you have had of his admirable goodness. You who are the children of God should think deeply and seriously of the great goodness of God, in giving Christ to and for you, in taking you into the bond of the covenant, in pardoning your iniquities, in sanctifying your natures, in reclaiming you from your wanderings, in moderating and mitigating your afflictions, in supporting and delivering you in temptations, and in guiding and conducting you in all your difficulties and perplexities. And think of his great goodness, in feeding, clothing, and preserving you, in giving you riches and wealth and honour. O hath he not been a good God to every one of you? Hath not goodness and mercy followed you all the days of your life? Have you not had some experiences of the goodness of God, even in common mercies, that deserve a special remark? What cause have you to cry out with the psalmist, *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God? How great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand* (a).

Exhort. 5. Admire the goodness of God. And, 1. Admire his goodness to you. His goodness, even in common blessings is wonderful. You may justly cry out with David, *Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto* (b)? But admire especially his goodness to you and others in spiritual and saving blessings. Admire the riches of it. O how great is his goodness! And admire the freedom of it: That so much goodness should be imparted to such vile unworthy creatures as you are; to you, and not to the angels that sinned; to you, rather than to many others that are better than you in natural and moral respects. 2. Admire his goodness in himself. All the manifestations he hath given of his goodness, and all your own experiences of it, fall infinitely short of the goodness of his nature. It cannot be comprehended, and therefore ought to be admired and adored. It will

(k) Micah ii. 17.

(a) Psal cxxxix. 17, 18. See xl. 5. (b) 2 Sam. vii. 18.

will be your uptaking work in heaven, to admire his goodness: And should it not be sweet to you to begin heaven's work here upon earth?

Exhort. 6. Improve the consideration of the divine goodness, and your own experiences of it, for engaging and quickening you to duty. And,

1. To quicken you to praise and thanksgiving. *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness (c).* To speak properly, Praise respects God's own excellencies; but thanksgiving respects his blessings and benefits to us. So that God's absolute goodness, his goodness in himself, is the object of praise: *Praise ye the Lord; for the Lord is good (d).* But his relative goodness, his goodness to us, is the object of thanksgiving: *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever (e).* You have all tasted of the goodness of God, in some respect or other; and therefore should be ready to cry out with the psalmist, *what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me (f)?* Consider the greatness of his benefits, the numerousness of them, and the unmeritedness of them; that so great blessings should be bestowed, in such plenty, on such undeserving and ill-deserving creatures as you are: O what matter of praise and thanksgiving is here! This the Lord requires; *offer unto God thanksgiving (g).* Glory, praise, and thanks, are the revenues of the crown of heaven: Therefore, though you cannot praise and thank God as he deserves, yet you should do it as you can.

2. To quicken you to repentance. His goodness leadeth to repentance (b). It is the very natural tendency of it to mollify the hearts of men, and to allure them to repentance. The consideration of God's goodness to you, should fill your hearts with grief and sorrow for sin. It should melt your hearts, to think that you have offended such a good God; a God who is so good in himself, and so good to you, and still waits to be good and gracious. It should also encourage you to turn to him, that he is a good God. O, come and try what a good God he will be to you, when you return to him. He is infinitely good: This should encourage you to seek his favour with hope of success.

3. To engage you to love him. That which is good is lovely and amiable. Now, God is the chief good, perfectly good, infinitely good: Therefore he is most worthy of your love, and

(c) Psal. cvii. 8. (d) Psal. cxxxv. 3. (e) Psal. cxxxvi. 1.
(f) Psal. cxvi. 12. (g) Psal. l. 14. (b) Rom. ii. 4.

and should be loved with a superlative love, above all other things. His goodness renders him beautiful, and his beauty renders him lovely. Therefore both are joined together in my text, *How great is his goodness? And how great is his beauty?* You cannot love God as he deserves: But you should love him as you can, and lament that you love him no better. Prefer his glory above all that is dear to you; and be ready to part with all things for him. The blessings and benefits you have received from him solicit your love. There is an obligation on every man's nature to answer bounty with love. But you should love him especially for the goodness and excellency of his own nature. This is to love God for himself.

4. To engage you to serve and obey him. When David considered the absolute goodness of his nature, and his relative goodness in his benefits, he presently expresses his ardent desire to be acquainted with God's statutes, that he might obey and keep them. *Thou art good says he, and dost good: Teach me thy statutes (i).* And Samuel pleads with the children of Israel, *Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth, with all your heart: For consider how great things he hath done for you (k).* The goodness of God lays on us the strongest obligations. As he is our great and bountiful Benefactor, he hath a claim to our most exact obedience, so that it cannot be denied to him without vile ingratitude.

5. To encourage you to trust in him. *O taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man that trusteth in him (l).* His goodness is the foundation of trust. His promises would not be a sufficient ground of trust, without his truth; nor would his truth be comfortable, without a belief of his good-will†. His goodness is the great encouragement. He is a good God; therefore let us trust in him, and rely on him. And it should encourage you to trust in him the more, that you have already so many experiences of his goodness.

6. To encourage you to prayer. If you want any good thing, he hath it; and he is infinitely good, and ready to communicate. *He gives liberally (m).* We cannot rise in our thoughts to the infiniteness of the divine goodness. His bounty is too large for our thoughts. Let this enlarge your desires in prayer, and encourage you to come to God with hope. You

come

(i) Psal. cxix. 68. (k) 1 Sam. xii. 24. (l) Psal. xxxiv. 8.

† *Quamvis est igitur meritis indebita nostris,
Magna tamen spes est in bonitate Dei.*

(m) Jamca i. 5.

Ovid. 1. de Ponto 7.

come to a good God, who is not niggardly and sparing of his blessings. This should also encourage you to be frequent in prayer. He is a good God, and will not upbraid you. He will not reproach you with the frequency of your addresses to him. His door stands always open; and the oftener you come to him, the more welcome.

Exhort. 7. Imitate the goodness of God. You profess to be partakers of the divine nature: Therefore each of his perfections should have an answerable character and impression upon you. He is good, and doth good: So should you be good, and do good. It is said of Joseph of Arimathea, that he was a good man, and a just; and of Barnabas, that he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith (n). Study to be good, of a holy and heavenly heart. And not only be good, but do good, and that to the worst of men. How earnestly doth our blessed Saviour press this: *Bless them that curse you, says he, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust* (o). And again, *Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil* (p). When you do good to your enemies and them that hate you, this is to triumph over yourselves; and it is the way to vanquish the hearts of others. Hence the apostle exhorts, *Overcome evil with good* (q). Do good by supplying and relieving them that are in want and distress: Be bountiful. *To do good and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased* (r). *As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith* (s). Do good, not to those of your own party or profession only, but to all. Your charity should be very extensive. God is so good, that he provides for the very beasts; and shall we neglect any that are of the same blood with ourselves? God hath given to some of you riches and wealth, not merely for yourselves, but that you may attain the honour of imitating him, by doing good to others with the blessings you enjoy. This will turn more to your account, than what is vainly and prodigally consumed on back and

(n) Luke xxiii. 50. Acts xi. 24.

(p) Luke vi. 35.

(s) Gal. vi. 10.

(q) Rom. xii. 21.

(o) Mat. v. 44, 45.

(r) Heb. xiii. 16.

and belly and household furniture. You are not absolute proprietors of what you have, but stewards entrusted for others: Therefore, to convert all to your own use, is to embezzle your master's goods, and monopolize the divine goodness.

Use 5. For exhortation, to such of you as have had sweet and refreshing experiences of the special goodness of God. Let me exhort such to these duties.

1. Be humble. *Walk humbly with thy God (t).* Ye who have the richest and sweetest experiences of the goodness of God, are most in danger of being overtaken with spiritual pride; and your pride may provoke God to leave you very poor in hand. It was the saying of a holy man, *My best hours do me most harm.* Dear Christians, be at pains to keep your hearts low. Meditate much on your own vileness, and the freedom of the divine goodness.

2. Be thankful to God, and bless his name: As the psalmist: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things (u).* Many would be glad of your leavings. There are some, whose nature, disposition, and endowments, are better than yours, yet they receive less from God than you do. Therefore be thankful for what you have received, and do not murmur or complain, though you get not all you desire. Serious Christians are sometimes earnest for more than they are able to bear. As Moses, when he prayed, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.* But what says the Lord? *Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live (x).* As if he had said, Moses, you know not what you ask; you forget that you are but a poor clay vessel. Some of you are earnest for extraordinary manifestations, and full draughts of joy and comfort: But you are weak vessels, and not able to bear these; a taste is all that you are able to bear. Therefore, though you get not all you would have, be thankful if you have gotten a taste; something to wean your heart from the world, and to keep up your appetite, and set you a longing for heaven. You shall have full draughts when you come home to your Father's house.

3. Impart your experiences to others: As the psalmist: *Come and hear, all ye that fear God, says he, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul (y).* It will be a great invitation to others, when you tell them how good God hath been to
your

(t) Micah-vii 8. (u) Psal. ciii. 1, 5. (x) Exod. xxxiii 19, 20. (y) Psal. lxi. 16.

your soul. Therefore, shew them what good and rich entertainment you have had in God's house; and proclaim to them what a good God and Master you have found him to be, that they may be encouraged to come to God, and to wait on him in these duties and ordinances wherein you have had such blessed success.

4. Take pleasure in the service of God. You serve a good Master. Have you not found him to be so? Therefore serve him with complacency and delight, that the world may see that true religion is no melancholy thing, and that you may wipe off the reproaches cast upon the way of God.

5. Enlarge your desires after more, whatever your present receipts and enjoyments be. In your Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. There is still more to be had, if more could be held. There is enough in an infinitely good God, to fill up all your faculties, your understandings, wills and affections. O how great is the goodness that is laid up for you! It is great beyond expression, great beyond imagination: and there being so much laid up, let your desires still be enlarged.

6. Sit not down content and satisfied with the sweetest tastes and experiences you have of the goodness of God in this life; for all is but a taste in comparison of what is laid up for you in heaven. This world is not a place of full contentment to you; as not in temporals, so neither in spirituals. It is true, your heart is sometimes refreshed with your sweet experiences of the divine goodness; yet you cannot rest fully content with them: though there be contentment in the things themselves, simply considered; yet there is not, in regard of their measure, and the degree of enjoyment; you have them but scantily and sparingly. Therefore, how refreshing soever your present experiences and enjoyments be, yet be content to be gone hence. Be not satisfied, though it were at your wish, to live always here.

7. Long for the full fruition. Your richest and sweetest experiences of the divine goodness, being but a taste, should be so far from staying your longings, that they should increase the same, and make you more eager. For, if these experiences be so sweet and refreshing, what will heaven and glory be? If joy unspeakable and full of glory; if peace that passeth all understanding, be but a taste, how great will the happiness of heaven be? If one glimpse of God in the heart be so ravishing, what will it be to have the full enjoyment of him? If there be so much sweetness in begun communion with God

in ordinances, what sweetness will there be in full and immediate communion with him? The truth is, how sweet and refreshing soever these experiences be, that believers sometimes have in this world, yet heaven will be a surprise to them when they come there. Well then, let all this set your heart a longing, O when shall *the day break, and the shadows flee away*? Let these sweet foretastes sharpen your appetite for the full feast of glory. Long earnestly for that happy day, when you shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of the upper house, and drink of the rivers of God's pleasure (z).

8. Rejoice in hope of the glory to come. All your sweet and refreshing experiences of the divine goodness, are but a taste, in comparison of what you shall have. Let the thoughts of this bear up your heart under all pressures of affliction. There is a sound of trouble in our ears. Our hainous sins against God, and the present aspect of providence, threaten us with sad and weary days of trouble. But God hath given you some foretastes of the glory to come, to keep you in heart in the worst of times. Study to improve your refreshing experiences this way, that you may go on in your way rejoicing.

(z) Psal. xxxvi. 8.

DISCOURSE IX.

Of the Justice of God.

SERMON XL.

Deut. xxxii. 4. *He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

THE Lord, foreseeing that the children of Israel would, after their being put in possession of the promised land, forsake him, and break covenant with him, doth therefore order Moses to write this Song, which we have in this chapter, to oblige them to the more watchfulness and circumspection, and to be a witness for him against them.

In the Song itself, we have, 1. A preface. 2. The body of the Song.

1. A preface or introduction to it, in the two first verses, where we have, 1. A solemn appeal to heaven and earth concerning

cerning the justice and equity of God's proceedings against Israel. Verse 1st, where he calls in men and angels, as witnesses of the justice and equity of his procedure: intimating thereby, that if Israel did not hear, the whole creation would bear witness against them. 2. A declaration or wish concerning the doctrine he was to deliver. Verse 2d, *My doctrine shall drop as the rain, &c.* That is, Such is the excellency and seasonableness of my doctrine, that much good fruit may rationally be expected by it. Or, the words may be rendered thus, *Let my doctrine drop as the rain, &c.* And so it is a wish or prayer, O that it might be so! That my doctrine may not be lost upon you, but may have good fruit. Such as are employed in delivering the mind and will of God to men, ought to be much concerned for success, that their doctrine may have blessed fruits and effects on their hearts and lives.

2. The body of the Song, from verse 3d and downward, where that which we meet with in the first place, is a declaration of the greatness and righteousness of God. 1. A declaration of his greatness: verse 3d, *Because I will publish the name, &c.* As if he had said, I will publish and declare his glorious and matchless excellencies, and his righteous and worthy actions; therefore do you own and acknowledge the same. He begins with this, to shew what folly and madness it would be, to forsake such a God for mere vanities, and that God would not be to blame whatever befel them. 2. A declaration of his unchangeable and perfect justice and righteousness, verse 4th.

Moses's scope here is to justify God in his dealings with the children of Israel: For, being in this Song to give an account of the terrible judgments that would come upon them for their sins, he premits this declaration of the righteousness of God, to shew that how deplorable and calamitous soever their condition should be, yet could not God be accused of any iniquitous or wrong dealing with them. Here are divers expressions, all pointing, as I conceive, at the immutable, perfect, and untainted justice and righteousness of God, in all his dealings with the children of men.

Express. 1. *He is the Rock.* Not only *a Rock*, but *THE Rock*, by way of excellency. He is *the Rock*, as for the stability and everlastingness of his nature, so also for his fixedness and immutability in executing judgment and justice. He is steadfast in justice and equity; firm and unmovable, like a rock. He cannot be bribed or biassed to pervert judgment.

Express. 2. *His work is perfect.* That is, all his works and actions

actions are unblameable, without any flaws or defects, being perfectly righteous. *As for God, says the psalmist, his way is perfect (a).*

Express 3. All his ways are judgment. All his ways—that is, All his administrations in the world, and particularly his dealings with the children of men, they are all judgment. Judgment signifies both justice and wisdom. All his ways are justice; that is, most just, perfectly just: there is nothing unjust in his way. The ways of the Lord are right (b). And they are all wisdom; that is, perfectly wise; he acts most wisely, judiciously, and rationally: For he is a God of judgment (c). He hath infinitely wise reasons for all he doth, so that it ill becomes any to censure or find fault with his administrations.

Express 4. He is a God of truth. This may be referred, both to his promises, and to his threatenings. 1. To his promises. He is a God of truth; that is, he is faithful in keeping promise. This may be cast in, to show that how sad soever their condition should be, yet they would have no cause to accuse God of unfaithfulness in not keeping promise or covenant with them; for, he is a God of truth. 2. To his threatenings. He is a God of truth; true in his threatenings, as well as in his promises. His threatenings cannot fall to the ground. Therefore if people take liberty to sin, they cannot blame him if he execute judgment upon them: For, he must be just to himself.

Express 5. He is without iniquity. That is, there is nothing wrong or amiss in his dealings: He cannot possibly wrong any man.

Express 6. Just and right is he. These may be understood as synonymous terms, signifying one and the same thing. He is a just and righteous God. Justice and righteousness are often of the same import in scripture; or, they may be distinguished thus: He is just in all afflicting providences, for he never punisheth men more than they deserve: And he is right in rewarding his people; he gives an abundant recompence to them that serve him, and will take care that none shall be losers by him, or for his sake.

The doctrine I propose from these words, is this:

God is immutably and perfectly just and righteous in all his dealings with the children of men.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall,

1. Prove

(a) Psa. xviii. 30. (b) Hos. xiv. 9. (c) Isa. xxx. 18.

1. *Prove that God is just.*
2. *Shew what the justice of God is; or, what is the nature of this divine perfection, and wherein it is manifested or discovered.*
3. *Assign some properties of it.*
4. *Make application of the whole.*

First, Let me shew that God is just; or, that justice is one of the excellencies and perfections of the divine nature. Though there is no necessity of insisting in the proof of this; yet it may be of use to us to consider, that the justice of God is variously set forth to us in the holy scriptures. As, 1. *Affirmatively*, He is expressly called just and righteous. *The just Lord (d)*; *The righteous Lord (e)*; *The just One (f)*. He is *most just (g)*; altogether just. He is said to be so in all his ways and works (h). And his righteousness is owned and acknowledged, not only by the saints (i), but also by the wicked and ungodly (k). 2. *Negatively*, When the scripture removes from him all injustice and iniquity, and all the causes and effects of injustice: As in the text, He is without iniquity. And elsewhere it is said, *God is not unrighteous, and there is no unrighteousness in him*. The apostle rejects any contrary thought with indignation: *Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?*—*God forbid*: And again, *Is there unrighteousness with God?* *God forbid*. He regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward; and there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (l). To the same purpose Elihu expresseth himself, *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly: neither will the Almighty pervert judgment (m)*. Mark the expression; though he be Almighty, yet he will not commit iniquity, nor pervert judgment. Men in high place and power do oft-times abuse their power to acts of injustice: But it is impossible that God should do so. *Wilt thou condemn him that is most just (n)*, says Elihu: Or, as others render it, *him that is strong and just*. Though he be strong and mighty, yet his might never exceeds right. Bildad puts the question, *Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice (o)?* Doth he? No, no: Though

(d) Zeph. iii. 5. (e) Psal. xi. 7. (f) Acts vii 52. (g) Job xxxiv. 17. (h) Psal. cxlv. 17. Dan. ix. 14. Rev. xv. 3. (i) Jer. xii. 1. (k) Exod. ix. 27. (l) 2 Chron. xii. 6. Heb. vi. 10. Psal. xcii. 15. Rom. iii. 5, 6. and ix. 14. Deut. x. 17. 2 Chron. xix. 7. (m) Job xxxiv. 10, 12. (n) Job xxxiv. 17. (o) Job viii. 3.

Though he be so powerful, that he can do what he will ; yet he is so just, that he will do nothing but what is right. 3. *Affectively*, When the scripture attributes to God, after the manner of men, such affections as suppose justice ; as *wrath, anger, revenge, jealousy*. Texts of scripture are obvious. These are not passions in God, as they are in us, but denote acts of his immutable justice. 4. *Symbolically and metaphorically* : As, when he is called *a consuming fire* (p) ; whereby is represented the severity of his justice, that he will consume impenitent sinners, as fire doth the dry stubble. To the same purpose, he is compared to *a lion*, and *a young lion* (q). 5. *Effectively* : When the scripture affirms that he *renders to every man according to his works* (r).

And God must needs be just, 1. Because he is a Being absolutely perfect. He must needs have all possible perfections in himself, and consequently this of perfect justice. 2. There is justice and righteousness in men, and it is a perfection in them ; therefore it must be eminently in God. All that justice and righteousness that is to be found among men, must needs proceed from him ; he is the original author and fountain cause of it : and if he make men just, certainly he himself must be much more so, even essentially, infinitely, perfectly, immutably, and eternally just. As many as are renewed by grace, are made just and righteous (s) : Therefore God must needs be righteous, seeing such a quality in men is the copy of his nature. 3. It is clear from his office as Governor and Judge of the world. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right* (t) ? He could not govern and judge the world, if he were not just. This is the apostle's argument : *Is God unrighteous ?* says he, *God forbid ; For then how shall God judge the world* (u) ? 4. Even the heathens had a sense of this divine perfection. "Justice follows God †," saith Plutarch. And a Heathen poet had this apprehension of his idol gods ‡, "They love not unrighteousness, but honour justice." And Plato saith, that " * God is not in any wise unjust, but so far as is possible most just : and that § nothing is more like God than " a just man." And that the justice of God was generally believed

(p) Deut. iv. 24. Heb. xii. 29. (q) Isa. xxxviii. 13. Hos. v. 14. (r) Job xxxiv. 11. and elsewhere. (s) Eph. iv. 24. (t) Gen. xviii. 25. (u) Rom. iii. 5, 6. † Τὸ Θεῷ ἐπεται δική.

‡ Θεοὶ δὲ ὅσπερ ἀνθρώποι ἐργα φιλοῦσι ἀλλὰ δικὴν τιμῶσι. Homer.

* Θεὸς ἑδραμὴν ἑδραμῶς ἑδικός ἄλλ' ὥς οἱοντι δίκαιοτατος.

§ Nihil Deo similius, quam homo iustissimus. Plato Theæti.

lieved by the Heathens, is evident from that custom received among them of attesting God by solemn oaths, whereby they appealed to him as a righteous Judge, who would certainly avenge all falsehood and injustice.

Second, I go on to shew, what the justice of God is; or, what is the nature of this divine perfection. The justice of God may be considered, absolutely, or relatively. Absolutely considered, God is just in himself: And so, his justice is nothing else, but the absolute rectitude and perfection of his nature. In this sense, it comprehends all his moral perfections, his holiness, goodness, faithfulness, &c. This is called by some his *universal justice*; at least it answers to that which is so called among men. Relatively, it may be considered, 1. In relation to himself: And so, he is just to himself, in acting agreeably to his nature and perfections. An ancient writer observes * that "when God is merciful to sinners, he is just to himself, as acting congruously to his own goodness." All his actions are such as become such a pure and holy Being. He cannot do any thing that is contrary to the perfection of his nature. *He cannot deny himself (x)*. Again, he is just to himself in maintaining his own glory and honour, and his divine rights and prerogatives; for *he will not give his glory to another (y)*. There are certain rights which are everlastingly and inseparably inherent in the Deity, and which God can by no means part with or denude himself of; as, his independency, his sovereignty, his supreme and absolute propriety in, and dominion over the creatures. Now, the fixed determination of his will to maintain these rights is his justice to himself. 2. In relation to others: And so, he is just towards his creatures; just in all his dealings, particularly with man.

For clearing this, let us consider God, 1. As Sovereign Lord. 2. As Supreme Governor and Judge of the world.

1. As Sovereign Lord: And so, he hath right to *do with his own as he will (z)*. He may order and dispose of all his creatures according to his own pleasure: For *he doth according to his will, in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can say to him, What dost thou (a)*? Being absolute Sovereign, he hath no other rule herein but his own will; so that whatever he wills concerning the disposal

* *Justus es secundum te, misericors es secundum nos.*

Anselm. Profol. C. 10.

(x) 2 Tim. ii. 13. (y) Isa. xlii. 8. (z) Matth. xx. 15.

(a) Dan. iv. 35.

posal and ordering of his creatures, is therefore just, because he wills the same. We are *in his hand, as the clay in the hand of the potter (b)*. Accordingly, he had right to frame and make all the creatures according to his own pleasure, and is not accountable for his work unto any: For he hath *created all things, and for his pleasure they are and were created; and he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (c)*. And as none of the other creatures can complain that God made them thus, or thus; so man could not complain, though God had not endowed him with such and such excellencies. *Shall the thing formed, say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus (d)?* Again, being our Sovereign Lord, he hath absolute right to use and dispose of us, according to his own pleasure; to set us high or low, in prosperity or adversity, as it pleaseth him. And he hath absolute and incontrollable sovereignty over all men, to dispose of them, either to death or life, as it seems good in his sight: For *if he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust (e)*. Being absolute Sovereign, he is not accountable unto any: For *who hath given him a charge over the earth? Or who hath disposed the whole world (f)?* Surely he may do with his own what he will; and all are his own.

It is so also in his dispensations of grace. He hath absolute right to dispose of grace and mercy to whom he pleaseth; and what he wills in that matter, is just and righteous, because he wills it. He did chuse some to everlasting life, and left others to perish in their own sins: He gives grace to some, and denies it to others. These are acts of sovereignty, wherein God acts by royal prerogative, according to his own will and pleasure. *He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth (g)*. None can complain of any wrong done to him: For being Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, he hath right to shew mercy and bestow grace on whom he pleaseth. To this purpose our blessed Saviour gives thanks to the Father: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight (h)*. As Sovereign Lord of all the creatures, he was free to chuse and refuse whom he pleased. Did he not pass by fallen angels and take man? And by the same right of dominion,

(b) Jer. xviii. 6. (c) Rev. iv. 11. Eph. i. 11. (d) Rom. ix. 20.
 (e) Job xxxiv. 14. (f) Job xxxiv. 13. (g) Rom. ix. 18.
 (h) Matth. xi. 25, 26.

minion, he may pick out some men and pass by others. And being sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, he hath absolute right to dispose of his own grace, and is debtor to none. He is not unjust in denying grace to a great part of men, seeing he might justly deny it to every man: For *who hath enjoined him his way?* Or *who can say thou hast wrought iniquity (i)?* If he give grace to any, it is great mercy: If he had not bestowed a mite of it on any man, it had been no wrong. So that in all this he acts justly.

But though he hath right, as sovereign Lord, to do with his own as he will; yet in the exercise of his sovereignty, he is always attended with the other perfections of his nature. Though he is under no law without himself; yet he hath a law in his own nature. He acts not by a mere will, but according to a rule within himself, to wit, the rectitude and perfection of his own nature: So that his sovereignty is managed by the rules of wisdom, holiness, and goodness. He can do nothing by his right of sovereignty, but what is unquestionably agreeable with these perfections. 1. His sovereignty is exercised in great wisdom. He is *a God of judgment (k)*. He acts judiciously and rationally. He hath infinitely wise reasons for all that he doth, though his reasons are often hid from us †. His will is never without counsel: Hence it is called *the counsel of his will*. But seeing he hath not revealed any other reason or cause of many of his dispensations, but his sovereign will and pleasure; therefore we ought to acquiesce therein without murmuring or disputing, and say with our blessed Saviour, *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*; and adore the depth of his wisdom, crying out with the apostle, *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out (l)!* 2. His sovereignty is managed in a consistency with his holiness. He *sits on a throne of holiness (m)*. So, he could not by his absolute sovereignty make man a sinner, because of his infinite holiness. His sovereignty and his holiness are inseparable; so that he can do nothing by his sovereign will, but what is agreeable with his infinite purity. 3. His sovereignty is exercised in a consistency with his goodness.

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ness.

(i) Job xxvi. 23. (k) Isa. xxx. 18.

† *Quare ergo illi datum est, et illi non datum? non, me piget dicere, Hoc est Profundum Crucis Admirations exclamare possum, Disputatione demonstrare non possum quoniam magnifica sunt opera tua, Domine.*

Aug. de Verb. Apostol. Serm. 7.

(l) Rom. xi. 33. (m) Psal. xlvii. 8.

ness. His throne is a *throne of grace* (n). As a throne is attributed to him, to express his sovereignty; so he is represented having a *rainbow about his throne, in sight like unto an Emerald* (o), which is an emblem of his covenant; to shew that the exercise of his sovereignty toward his people, is tempered with grace, mercy, and goodness: He is *ever mindful of his covenant* (p).

S E R M O N XLI.

II. **G**OD is to be considered as Supreme Governor and Judge of the world: And so, he is just in governing his rational creatures, in a way agreeable to their nature, according to a law he hath given them. As he is Judge of the world, he doth not act arbitrarily, as he doth in acts of sovereignty; but according to a law and rule that he hath given unto men. Of this especially my text speaks. And elsewhere it is said, *He shall judge the world in righteousness: And, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right* (a)? His justice, as supreme Judge and Governor, is either legislative or executive.

(1.) His legislative justice is that whereby he gives most just laws to his creatures, commanding and forbidding what is fit for them in right reason to do and forbear: For, *The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver* (b). Man being a reasonable creature, capable of moral government; therefore, that God might rule him according to his nature, he hath given him a law, confirmed by promises of a reward to draw him by hope, and by threatenings of punishment to deter him by fear. Hence Moses tells the people that he had *set before them life and good, and death and evil*: And again, *that he had set before them life and death, blessing and cursing* (c). It is certainly most just for God to command. Who should give laws to the world, but the Supreme Being? His justice to himself obliges him to enact penal laws, as the measure of the creature's subjection and obedience. He cannot maintain his right of dominion without them. How shall man be a subject, without a law? And how can a law subsist without a penalty? For in that case the creature, by his transgression and disobedience, would wholly exclaim himself from subjection to God.

The

(n) Heb. iv. 16. (o) Rev. iv. 3. (p) Psal. cxi. 5.
 (a) Psal. ix. 8. Gen. xviii. 25. (b) Isa. xxxiii. 22. (c) Deut.
 xxxii. 15, 19.

The honour of God's law, in case of transgression, cannot be secured, without a subjection of the transgressor to punishment by a certain penalty. And as he is just in enacting penal laws, so all his laws are *holy, just, and good* (d). They are fit for God to give, for they carry a stamp of his own nature on them; and fit for man to receive, if he would preserve the rectitude of his nature. The perfection of a reasonable creature is greatly concerned in obedience to God. What doth the Lord require of you, but to be holy, just, temperate, meek, merciful; to *live soberly, righteously, and godly* (e). So that the justice of God as a lawgiver is very evident. And he is just in requiring obedience to his law, though we have no power of ourselves to obey; because our inability was voluntarily contracted by our own sin. Man in his first state, had a power to do whatsoever God would command him; but he lost that power, yea, cast it away, by his apostacy from and rebellion against God: Therefore God may justly require obedience; for though man lost his power of obeying, yet God's right of commanding still remains. Though man prodigally spent his stock, yet God may justly challenge his own. Obedience being that which man as a rational creature owes to God, God would be unjust to himself, if he did not demand his own from man. And God requires obedience to his law, though he know that man hath no power to obey, to make men sensible of their impotency; to press them to have recourse to the grace of God in Christ to enable them; to clear his justice in punishing obstinate and rebellious sinners: And that by the means of such commands men may be drawn to God; for he draws with *the cords of a man*, and commands, backed with promises and threatenings, are means suited to his rational nature.

(2.) There is the executive justice of God; called also by some his judicial justice; by others, his distributive justice. Hereby he is just, in giving every one his due, and rendering unto men according to their works, without respect of persons: *For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways*: And, without respect of persons, he judgeth according to every man's work (f). Of this the

(d) Rom. vii. 12.

(e) Tit. ii. 12.

* *Deus jubet aliqua quæ non possumus, ut noverimus quid ab illo petere debeamus.*

August. de Grat. & Lib. arb. c. 16.

Ut scias quid acceperis, ut videas quid amiseris, ut intelligas unde repetendum sit quod amiseris.

(f) Job xxxiv. 11. 1 Pet. i. 17.

the apostle speaks at large, Rom. ii. 5, — 11. And he must needs be just in this matter, 1. Because he is infinite in knowledge; so that he knows the whole compass of justice: He hath a clear idea of it in his understanding; and he knows all matters of fact exactly and perfectly, so that he cannot be misled. To this purpose it is said, *The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed: And, his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. For he will not lay upon man more than right, that he should enter into judgment with God (g).* 2. He is infinite in power, and can do what he pleaseth; so that he is able to execute justice and judgment according to his knowledge. And, 3. He cannot deal unjustly, because he hath no need so to do, nor any temptation to it. Being God All-sufficient, sufficient of himself to his own happiness, he hath no need of any thing from the creature, nor can it be of any advantage to him to deal unjustly: And being supreme Governor and Judge of the world, he hath none above him to gratify by any act of injustice. So that if it were possible he could act unjustly, it behoved to be from an intrinsecal hatred of justice, which were most absurd to imagine, and were to make him worse than the vilest among men. Even among men, he is a monster of mankind, that will act unjustly, when he hath no temptation so to do.

Particularly, the executive justice of God, is either remunerative or afflictive.

1. Remunerative or rewarding justice. God is just in rewarding his peoples' obedience, and their diligence and faithfulness in his service. Hence the psalmist says, *The Lord rewardeth me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me (h).* And the apostle tells the believing Hebrews, that God was not unrighteous, to forget their work and labour of love (i). He rewards his people, 1. Sometimes with temporal blessings. Godliness hath the promises even of this life. And sometimes providence doth notably interpose, and loads obedience with blessings, *So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth (k).* True it is, God's obedient people are sometimes pinched with wants, and meet with various outward afflictions: Yet even these are the accomplishment of a gracious promise, and are ordered for their

(g) 1 Sam. ii. 3. Job. xxxiv. 21, 22, 23.

(h) Psal. xviii. 30.

(i) Heb. vi. 10. (k) Psal. lviii. 11.

their good, to chastise them for sin, and quicken them to repentance and mortification *; to try and exercise their faith and patience, their sincerity, and love to God; to wean their hearts from the world; to promote their growth in grace. Their outward troubles occasion an increase of inward blessings. And whatever their portion in the world is, they have it by promise, and with a blessing, and as a fruit of special love. 2. He rewards his people with spiritual blessings. They have the hundred-fold in this life, which is better felt than expressed. There are fresh supplies and influences of grace, near and intimate communion, manifestations of love, intimations of peace and pardon, joy and peace in believing, &c. Even in keeping his commands there is great reward (l). 3. He rewards them with eternal blessings. With this the apostle comforts the believing Thessalonians: *It is, says he, a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven. And the same apostle affirms that a crown of righteousness was laid up for him (m).*

I cannot but here observe, that God's rewarding the obedience of his people doth not imply any merit. The reward is free and gratuitous †, of grace and not of debt (n). We stand in the relation of servants, so that our obedience is due to God: And it is attended with so many imperfections, that we might expect punishment rather than a reward: And though it were perfect, yet there is no proportion between it and the glory to come; nor can we profit God by it. But God is just in rewarding our obedience, 1. Because Christ hath merited it. He hath satisfied justice for our sins, and interposed an everlasting merit; therefore it is just for God to forgive sin, and to bestow the blessings Christ paid a dear price for. Hence he is said to be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus (o). 2. Because of his own promise. Hence it is said, *Thou hast performed thy words, for thou art righteous (p).* As it is just for men to pay their debt; so † God having

* *Nec unquam bono quicquam mali evenire potest, nec vivo, nec mortuo.*

Cic. 1. Tuscul.

(l) Psal. xix. 11.

(m) 2 Thess. i. 7. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† *Dat potius quod suum est, quam reddit quod nostrum.*

Concil. Araus. C. 22.

(n) Rom. iv. 4.

(o) Rom. iii. 26.

(p) Neh. ix. 8.

‡ *Iustum est ut reddat quod debet debet, autem quod pollicitus est.*

Bern.

Promittendo se debitorem facit. August.

having made himself a debtor to his people by promise, his justice obligeth him to make it good.

2. Afflictive justice. God is just in all the afflictions he brings upon his creatures. I shall not here meddle with that debate, whether God may in justice afflict an innocent creature: Only it is evident, that none of the rational creatures, whom he is pleased to afflict, are innocent. All are guilty before God, so that none of them can complain of any wrong or iniquitous dealing, whatever their afflictions be. All the miseries and troubles of the children of men are the bitter fruits of their own sin: For, if man had not sinned, he had lived in a happy state, according to the covenant of works. True it is, God doth not always afflict men with an eye to their sins as the cause: But sometimes for their trial, and to shew his sovereignty and dominion, as is clear in the case of Job, *against whom God was moved, to destroy him without cause* (g); and to manifest his own glory, which was the end of Lazarus' sickness, and of the poor man's blindness from his birth (r). Yet all the children of Adam have sin enough to justify God in the sharpest afflictions he brings upon them; and sin is still the coal from which these sparks do flee. But though all the afflictions he brings upon men are occasioned by sin, yet they are not all designed for the avenging of sin. Therefore we may distinguish his afflictive justice into that which is corrective, and that which is reductive, and that which is vindictive.

(1.) Corrective justice is that whereby God is just in the afflictions he brings upon his own children for their correction and amendment: For *He will not lay upon man more than is right, that he should enter into judgment with God* (s). But though he is just in them, yet they are not acts of divine revenge, but effects of divine love. *As many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens* (t). They are from God, not simply as a Judge, but as a Father (u); or as he is † a Judge and Father. Christ made full and perfect satisfaction for the sins of his people; so that vindictive justice hath no plea against them: Therefore their afflictions are not punishments to satisfy justice, but rods in the hand of a father (x). He is indeed just in them, yet not simply as a judge, but as a judge that stands

(g) Job ii. 3. (r) John xi. 4. and ix. 2 (s) Job xxxiv. 23.

(t) Rev. iii. 19. (u) Heb. xii.

† Paternus Juxta.

(x) Heb. xii. 7.

stands in the relation of a father, as a judge reconciled. He strikes his children; but always in reason, and for their good. He chastens us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness (y). Sometimes, indeed, God is pleased to exercise great severity toward his own, and to lay grievous afflictions on them; as he dealt with Moses, Aaron, David, and others: Yet this was not done to satisfy justice, seeing their sin was pardoned before; but to demonstrate to the world what a holy and just God he is (z). He will not pass by the disorders of his own children, without some mark of his displeasure, to keep up the honour of his government, and to shew what an impartial Judge he is, for a warning to others (a). For in such cases men are apt to cry out, if God spare not his own sons, what then shall become of his enemies? If such things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

(2.) Reductive justice is that whereby God is just in these afflictions he sometimes brings on his elect, for reducing them from their evil ways, and bringing them home to himself. They are acts of justice indeed, but also of love and mercy. They are fruits of electing love, of God's love of benevolence. Some God chuseth in the furnace of affliction (b). The hot furnace is God's work-house wherein he sometimes formeth vessels of honour. Manasseh is an eminent instance. When the prodigal began to be in want, he then thought of returning to his father. Many that were never serious before, are brought to bethink themselves in their affliction (c).

(3.) Vindictive justice is that whereby God takes vengeance on wicked men, for their sins, and disobedience to his laws. *Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?* says the apostle, *God forbid.* He it is to whom vengeance belongeth. *It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble his people* (d).

God's inflicting punishment for sin, is not merely an effect of his will, or a transient motion which may be or may not be; but it issues from his vindictive justice, which is essential to his nature. It is expressly ascribed to his justice or righteousness, in the text last quoted, and in these following; *Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus. Thou art just in all that is brought upon us.* Hence his judgment is said to

(y) Heb. xii. 10.

(z) 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14. Psal. xcix. 8.

(a) Ezek. xxxviii. 23. (b) Isa. xlvi. 10. (c) 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12, 13. Luke xv. 17, 18, 19. 1 Kings viii. 47, 48. (d) Rom. iii. 5, 6. Psal. xciv. 1, 2. 2 Thess. i. 6.

to be a *righteous judgment*: And punishment is called a *just recompence* (e). Therefore the word in the Greek † language which sometimes denotes punishment (f), doth sometimes also denote the punitive justice itself (g): And it is with respect to this that God is called a *consuming fire*.

This vindictive justice of God is necessary as to its egress or exercise, so that he cannot let sin go unpunished. It is plain and evident, that it is necessary that sin should be punished, 1. In regard of God's eternal decree, whereby he hath purposed that he will by no means acquit the guilty. His purpose must stand (h). 2. In regard of the threatening: *In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die* (i). The word once gone out of his mouth must stand. But it is necessary also on the account of his just and righteous nature. For, 1. There being the same reason of all God's attributes, his justice must be as unchangeable and inflexible, as his goodness, mercy, holiness, &c. If he be so good, that he cannot but embrace an innocent creature; so merciful, that he cannot refuse a penitent believer; so holy, that he cannot look on sin: Then he must also be so just, that he cannot but punish sin. 2. It is clear from the general nature of justice, which is to give every one his due; reward to whom reward is due, and punishment to whom punishment is due. Now, punishment is due to sin: Sin merits it. *They who commit such things are worthy of death* (k). If God should let sin go without due punishment, what then would become of his justice? 3. It necessarily follows from the consideration of God's holiness. His justice is a branch or emanation from his holiness. Being infinitely holy that he cannot but hate sin, he must needs have a propensity to punish it. A will to punish sin, is always included in a hatred of it: And a will to punish cannot want its effect in him that hath power to do what he will. Hence Joshua infers from the holiness of God, that the sins of the Israelites were unpardonable, to wit, without a satisfaction to justice. *He is an holy God; says he, he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins* (l). 4. It is necessary for the honour of God as governor and judge of the world. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do*

right?

(e) Rev. xvi. 5. Neh. ix. 33. Rom. ii. 5. Heb. ii. 2.

† δικη.

(f) Jude 7. (g) Acts xxviii. 4. Heb. xii. 29. (h) Isa. xiv. 24, 26, 27. (i) Gen. ii. 17. (k) Rom. i. 32. (l) Josh. xxiv. 19.

right (m)? And is it not right that sin should be punished? When men have rebelled against God, violated his laws, trampled upon his authority, despised his sovereignty, and offended his holiness; if all this should pass unpunished, what a blot would it be on God's government? The justice and equity of his government requires that sin be punished, and licentiousness suppressed. Hence, 5. His justice in punishing sin is a part of his goodness. God promised to Moses to *make all his goodness pass before him* (n); and in enumerating the parts of his goodness, he mentions this, that he would *by no means clear the guilty, but visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*. As it is a part of the goodness of a governor, to punish that which makes a disorder in his government, and impairs the public welfare: So it is a part of God's goodness, as supreme Governor, to put and keep the world in order, which cannot be done without punishing what inverts and breaks that order. 6. This notion of God is engraven upon the minds of all men. Conscience is God's deputy, and hath a secret tribunal in the heart, and from the impress which divine justice hath set upon it, dooms and judges offenders unto misery. Even upon the commission of secret sins, conscience scourgeth men with remorse, and the mind reflects torment on itself. That God is a just judge and avenger of wickedness, is a notion that hath obtained in people of all nations. The Barbarians, upon the sight of the viper on Paul's hand, cry out of a vengeance that pursued him as a murderer (o). That universal practice of sacrificing beasts, and * in some places men, for expiating their sins, and turning away the wrath of their angry gods, implied a settled notion of the vengeance of God.

But though vindictive justice be essential to the nature of God, yet it is not natural to him so as heat is to the fire. For though it be necessary that God should punish sin, because of his righteous nature; yet not by a natural or physical necessity, as the fire burns, but by a moral and rational necessity. The fire burns without any influence of a free and rational principle: But God is a free agent, and therefore determines the mode, season, degree, and other circumstances of punishment, by his sovereign will and pleasure. Further, when we say that God cannot let sin go unpunished,

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(m) Gen. xviii. 25.

(n) Exod. xxxiii. 19. with xxxiv. 7.

(o) Acts xxviii. 4.

* See Owen *de Justitia Vindicat.* C. 4. pag. 69, 76.

we do not thereby limit the power of God; but it is the justice and righteousness of his own nature that bounds him. As he cannot lie or deny himself; so he cannot do any thing unjust; and it would be unjust to let sin go unpunished.

S E R M O N XLII.

THIS vindictive justice of God is variously manifested. As,

1. By executing terrible judgments for sin, even in this world. The saints own and acknowledge this: *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us. Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus (a).* The end of all God's judgments, is to witness to the world, that he is a just God. And to demonstrate this the more clearly, 1. He sometimes executes judgments on sinners openly and visibly, that others may see, and fear, and take warning. *He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others.* Sometimes he makes his judgments manifest: So that he is known by the judgment that he executeth (b). 2. Sometimes he executes desolating and destroying judgments on whole cities and nations. Of this we have frequent instances and examples in scripture. And the psalmist tells us, that God *destroyed cities*, and that *their memorial perished with them (c).* God himself gives a summary account of such dispensations; *I have cut off the nations; their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passed by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, there is none inhabitant (d).* 3. He sometimes executes strange and unheard of judgments. He works a new thing, and brings such judgments on people, as neither they nor their fathers ever heard or saw: So it was in the case of Dathan and Abiram; God made the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up quick (e). And † He rained hell out of heaven upon Sodom. 4. Sometimes he maketh quick work with sinners, and surpriseth them with sudden judgments. Thus, Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire from heaven: Herod was suddenly smitten by an angel: Fifty thousand of the Bethshemites were smitten for looking into the ark: Ananias and Sapphira were suddenly stricken dead. 5. He often proportions judgments to the

(a) Neh. ix. 33. Rev. xvi. 5. (b) Job xxxiv. 26. Rev. xv. 4. Psal. x. 16. (c) Psal. ix. 6. (d) Zeph. iii. 3. (e) Numb. xvi. 30, 32

† *Pluit Gehennam e Cælo.* Salvian, Lib. de provid.

the sins of men, so as they may read their sin in their punishment. Sodom's sin was a *flame of lust*, and her punishment a *flame of fire*; Haman was hanged on his own gallows: And many other instances there are, which confirm what the preacher says: *He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whose breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him (f).*

True it is that wicked men do usually prosper in their outward worldly condition: Yet there is what may abundantly vindicate and clear the justice of God in this matter. For, 1. There are other judgments and punishments besides outward afflictions. Even the very prosperity of wicked men is their judgment: It *destroys them* †. It is but a seeming prosperity, and not such truly. It is a curse to them: They are thereby *prepared for the day of slaughter (g)*. All their enjoyments are salted with a curse: *Cursed is their basket and their store (h)*: Their very blessings are curses. Their table proves a snare to them. God gives them *riches to their hurt (i)*; to be fuel for their pride, prodigality, luxury, intemperance, and other evils; so that they are thereby blinded, and hardened, and strengthened in their wickedness: and these are the forest judgments (k). 2. The execution of visible judgments is only suspended for a time. As some are God's elect, and therefore not to be cut off in their unregenerate state: So he endures also *with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (l)*. They are like malefactors condemned to death, only reprieved for a time. And God suspends the execution for just and wise reasons: Either *because he hath some belonging to the election of grace* to bring out of their loins; or, because he hath service for them in the way of his providence about his church and people; or because his people are sheltered under their wings. 3. Judgement, though delayed, will at last be executed. Tho' it be not suddenly executed, yet it is surely executed: As a chimney long foul will be fired at length. God will at length shew himself a just and righteous God. And the longer judgement be delayed, it will be the more severe when executed. Justice may, like a lion, seem to be asleep; but at last it will awake, and roar on the sinner. Hence the Lord threatens, *I have long time holden my peace, I have been still, and refrained myself; now will I cry like a travailling woman, I will destroy,*
and

(f) Eccles. viii. 10.

† *Improbo bene esse non potest.* Cic. par.

(g) Prov. i. 32. (h) Jer. xii. 3. (i) James v. 5. Deut. xxviii. 27. (k) Mal. ii. 2. Psal. lxi. 22. Eccl. v. 13. (l) Rom. ix. 22.

and devonr at once (m). God hath an eternity wherein to punish impenitent sinners. Hence Abraham is brought in speaking to the rich glutton, *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented* (n). 4. The greater their outward prosperity be, their judgment will be the more terrible for their manifold abuse of it. *They are lifted up on high, that their fall may be the greater* *. Their ingratitude for, and manifold abuse of his mercies, will furnish a severe indictment against them. While wicked sinners abuse God's patience toward them, they *treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God* (o).

2. The justice of God appears in sentencing so many millions of Adam's posterity to everlasting pains and torments for sin: According to that dreadful sentence that shall be pronounced at the last day: *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* (p). If you could view the pains of hell, and hear the shrieks and roarings of the damned there, you could not but cry out, O the severity of divine justice! Though they are the work of God's own hands, and roar and cry under their torments, yet can they not obtain any mitigation of them, not one drop of water to cool their tongues (q). The justice of God is inexorable.

3. It is manifest especially in the sufferings of Christ. God gave him to the death for this end, that it might be known what a just and righteous God he is. So the apostle tells us, that God *set him forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, &c* (r). He set him forth in garments rolled in blood, to declare his justice and righteousness to the world. After man's apostacy and rebellion, there was no way to keep up the credit and honour of divine justice, but either a strict execution of the law's sentence, or a sufficient satisfaction. The execution would have destroyed the whole race of Adam: Therefore Christ step in, and made a sufficient satisfaction by his death and sufferings, that God might exercise his mercy without prejudice to his justice. Thus, the blood of God must be shed for sin, to let the world see that he is a just God. The justice of God could and would be

(m) Isa. xlii. 10.

(n) Luke vi. 25.

* *Tolluntur in altum, ut lapsu graviore ruant.*

(o) Rom. ii. 5.

(p) Matt. xxv. 41.

(q) Luke xvi. 24, 26.

(r) Rom. iii. 25.

be satisfied with no less. Hence it is said, *God spared not his own Son (s)* Even the dear Son of God could obtain no abatement of his sufferings, no not from his own Father. God could not, and would not spare him. O the severity of divine justice!

4. The justice of God will be manifested in the great day. Then will be the solemn triumph of divine justice. *He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness (t).* That will be the great day of his wrath, and the revelation of his righteous judgment (u).

Third, I go on to assign some properties of the justice of God. In general, God is incomparable in justice; there is none like him in it. He is eminently just. Hence he is called *THE just One (x)*, by way of eminency, as if there were none just but he; because there is none just in comparison of him. *How should man be just with God (y)?* Hence he is called, *the habitation of justice (z)*. As if justice dwelt no where, and had no abode, but in him. Particularly, 1. He is essentially just. He is *most just (a)*. Orig. *Justice, justice*. He is Justice itself. Justice is his very essence. 2. He is necessarily just. He cannot but be just, and do justly. Being Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, his own will is his law, the most exact platform and rule of justice and righteousness. Hence he is said to *do according to his will (b)*. 3. He is perfectly just. So in the text, *his work is perfect*; and he is *without iniquity*. He is *justice, justice (c)*: That is, altogether just, without the least mixture, tincture, or shadow of injustice. There is in him *plenty of justice*: And *there is no unrighteousness in him (d)*. There are no flaws or defects in his works and actions. 4. He is immutably just. So it is said in my text, *He is the rock*. He is steadfast in justice and equity, firm and unmoveable like a rock. Hence the psalmist says, *He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him (e)*. He can no more be removed from dealing righteously, than a rock from its place. To the same purpose he tells us, *His righteousness is like the great mountains (f)*. That is, It is steadfast and unmoveable. God cannot be moved to pervert judgment. (1.) Not by a fear of any evil: For, he stands in awe of none because of their power or greatness. *His day of vengeance is upon all the cedars of Lebanon,*

(s) Rom viii. 32. (t) Acts xvii. 31. (u) Rom. ii. 5. (x) Acts vii. 52.
 (y) Job ix. 2. (z) Jer. l. 7. (a) Job xxxiv. 17. (b) Dan.
 iv. 35. (c) Job xxxiv. 17. (d) Job xxxvii. 23. Psal. xcii. 15.
 (e) Psal. xcii. 15. (f) Psal. xxxvi. 6.

banon, and upon all the oaks of Basban, and upon all the high mountains (g). Nor, (2.) By hope of gain: For nothing can be added to him. He cannot be bribed. He is *no taker of gifts (h).* 5. He is impartially just. He deals justly with all men, without respect of persons. He *respecteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor*; But judgeth according to every man's work, without respect of persons (i). The greatness and excellency of any cannot exempt them from just punishment. He spared not the angels that sinned; yea, he spared not his own Son, when he stood in the room and place of elect sinners. 6. He is infinitely just; *most just (k)*; just in the highest degree; yea, just beyond all degrees. His justice cannot be bounded or limited. 7. He is universally just. *All his ways are judgment*: And, he is *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works (l).* We are oft-times so bemisted that we cannot see the reasons of God's dispensations, and therefore are at a loss how to reconcile them with his nature and attributes. But there is justice and equity in all his dispensations, though it be not always obvious to our reason. His judgments are a great deep (m). That is, his acts and administrations, as Sovereign Lord and Judge of the world, are unfathomable. There is such a depth in them, that we cannot sound the same by the short line of our understanding. The actions of God are often mysterious, but never unrighteous. Even when *clouds and darknesses are round about him*; That is, when his providences are such dark riddles that none can unfold them; yet *righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Though we do not, or cannot see him, yet judgment is before him (n)*; so that we must not measure God by what we see. We are poor short-sighted creatures, and therefore must cry out with the apostle, *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out (o)?*

Fourth, I come in the last place to apply this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction. Is God infinitely just? Then there is a judgment to come. The justice of God requires that men should reap according to what they have sown: That it should be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do ill. But it is not apparently so in this world, because now is the time of God's patience and our trial: Therefore there must be a day when the justice of God shall be made manifest.

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(g) Isa. ii. 12, 13, 14. (h) 2 Chron. xix. 7. (i) Job xxxiv. 19. 1 Pet. i. 17. (k) Job. xxxiv. 17. (l) Psal. cxlv. 17 (m) Psal. xxxvi. 6. (n) Psal. xcvi. 2. Job xxxv. 14. (o) Rom. xi. 33.

This is the preacher's argument, *And moreover, says he, I saw, under the sun, the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: For there is a time there for every purpose, and for every work (p).* On that day the justice and righteousness of God shall be revealed; therefore it is called *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God (q).* The equity of God's dispensations is not now so fully seen: But all will be open and manifest on that day. Then God shall have the glory of his justice, and his righteousness shall be openly vindicated.

Use 2. Here is matter of terror to wicked sinners. O how terrible may it be to you, to think that there is an infinitely just God, who cannot but take vengeance on you, if you continue in your sins? And you cannot escape his righteous judgment. True it is, he is a God of infinite mercy, but he is also infinitely just, to take vengeance on them by whom mercy is despised; and while you continue in any known sin, you turn your back on mercy, by refusing to come up to the gracious terms on which mercy is offered: Therefore you *shall have judgment without mercy (r);* even a cup of wrath unmingled. One divine attribute is not exercised to the prejudice or wrong of another. Many harden themselves in sin by wrong notions of divine patience; God takes notice of this: *These things hast thou done, says he, and I kept silence: Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself (s).* But † divine patience is not forgiveness: God may forbear those whom he will not pardon. Even the vessels of wrath that are fitted for destruction may be endured with much long-suffering (t): But at length justice will avenge the abuse of patience: and justice will be the more severe, when long patience hath been much abused.

Use 3. Here is matter of comfort to the godly; to such of you as believe on Christ, and have received him by faith. The justice of God is for you, as well as his mercy. Justice is made your friend. Your blessed Redeemer hath satisfied it: He paid all your debt to the justice of God; so that justice hath nothing to crave of you, no plea against you. It doth not stand with the justice of God to exact the same debt again. Yea, your Redeemer did not only satisfy justice, but also merited

(p) Eccl. iii. 16, 17. (q) Rom. ii. 5. (r) James ii. 2. Rev. xiv. 10. (s) Psal. l. 21.

† *Quod differtur non aufertur.*

(t) Rom. ix. 22.

rited the exercise of it on your behalf. Hence it is that God is bound in justice to justify you upon your believing in Christ: For he is *just*, and the justifier of him who believeth in *Jesus* (u). He is just to pardon sins, upon your penitent confession of them. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins* (x). He is just to make good his promises to you: For *God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love* (y). And he is just to avenge the wrongs done to you by wicked men. *The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed* (z). So that the thoughts even of divine justice may be comfortable to you who believe in Christ.

Use 4. For exhortation. In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Let the consideration of the infinite justice of God engage you to flee to Christ. Consider,

1. You are guilty creatures; guilty by original sin, and by innumerable actual transgressions. You have offended and dishonoured God times without number. And, while you are out of Christ, every sin exposeth you to the wrath of God without a refuge to cover you. You are under sentence of condemnation by the law: For, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them* (a). You are like malefactors condemned to death; and the wrath and justice of God is pursuing you, and ready to take you by the throat, and to execute the law's curse every moment.

2. Divine justice must have a satisfaction. God in justice will not pardon your sins without one: So that you cannot else escape the terrible wrath that is due to you. It was God's design by all the priests and sacrifices under the law, to instruct that people, how alone the guilt of their sins might be expiated, to wit, by making atonement for them by sacrifice; and that there was no other way of salvation, but by a real propitiation and atonement made for their sins. The honour of God's justice, as Governor and Judge of the world, could not be kept up without a valuable satisfaction.

3. Neither ye yourselves nor any mere creature in heaven or earth, can make a valuable satisfaction to divine justice for your iniquities. There being an infinite evil in sin, in regard of the object against whom it is committed, viz. the infinite majesty of God; all the sufferings of men and angels, being but of a finite value, could not be a valuable satisfaction for it. And there is infinitely more evil in sin, than there is good in all

(u) Rom. iii. 26. (x) 1 John i. 9. (y) Heb. vi. 10.
(z) Psal. ciii. 6. (a) Gal. iii. 10.

all your repentance, prayers, and tears. Further, if you or any other mere creature could satisfy for your sins, then Christ had died in vain: Yea, God's giving his Son to the death, had rather been an act of cruelty to him, than an act of mercy to us.

4. Christ made full satisfaction to divine justice. For, he *suffered for our sins (b)*: Our sins being imputed to him, he suffered the punishment due to them. *He was made sin for us*: And *his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree (c)*. Hereby he fully satisfied divine justice. For, not only did God accept of his sufferings as a sufficient satisfaction, and smell a *sweet savour* of rest from them *(d)*; whereof his resurrection from the dead was a clear demonstration; but also they were, in themselves considered, a price of infinite value, considering the infinite dignity of the person suffering, who was every way equal with God; and considering also the greatness of his sufferings, being without any alloy or abatement of the least degree of misery. *God spared him not (e)*, in a way of impartial justice. He suffered all that law and justice required, and all that our sins deserved. From all which it appears, that you have a sufficient satisfaction for the ground of your faith.

5. You can have no interest in, nor benefit by Christ's satisfaction without faith in him. We read of *the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus (f)*. Till his blood be sprinkled on your souls, you can have no benefit by it; and it is sprinkled, as by the Spirit on his part, so by faith on our part, which is therefore called *faith in his blood (g)*. Though Christ satisfied divine justice, yet he did that without you; and it is not Christ without you that will do you any good, but Christ within you. Hence is that expression, *Christ in you*, not Christ in heaven, *the hope of glory (h)*.

6. Christ's satisfaction is put up to your account, when you receive him, and believe on his name. By faith in Christ we become mystically one with him: He *dwells in our hearts by faith (i)*. And when you are one with Christ, then Christ is yours: His death and sufferings, his blood and obedience; all are yours, and are put up to your account, as if you had actually obeyed and suffered in your own persons.

Be persuaded, therefore, if you would escape the strokes of sin-revenging justice, to flee to Christ, and receive and close with him by faith. Labour to be deeply convinced of sin, and of your misery and danger by sin: Study and believe the reali-

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(b) 1 Pet. iii. 18. (c) 2 Cor. v. 21. 1 Pet. ii. 24. (d) Eph. v. ii. (e) Rom. viii. 32. (f) 1 Pet. i. 2. (g) Rom. iii. 25. (h) Col. i. 27. (i) Eph. iii. 17.

ly and fulness of Christ's satisfaction: Renounce all ground of confidence in yourselves; and betake yourselves by faith to Christ's satisfaction alone. As under the Old Testament they laid their hand upon the head of the sacrifice, and thereby owned it as a sacrifice in their stead; so you must lay the hand of faith on the Lord Jesus, and put him in your room, and own him as a sacrifice in your stead, if you would have any benefit by him. Oh, how sad will your case be, if God shall reckon with you upon your own score? Wo, eternal wo, will be to you, if you meet a just and righteous God without a Mediator.

S E R M O N XLIII.

Exhort. 2. **S**TAND in awe to offend this infinitely just and righteous God. He is just to take vengeance for sin: Therefore *stand in awe and sin not (a)*. Improve the consideration of divine justice to give check to sin and temptations. When you are pampering the flesh, and giving loose reins to sin, remember there is a just God that taketh notice. Especially, young men may hereby abate the fervour of their youthful lusts. Therefore the preacher doth by this give check to the vanities and pleasures of youth: *Rejoice, O young man, in thy truth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment (b)*. There is much here to keep even God's own children in awe. Though you are dear to God, yet he will not spare you, if you take liberty to sin. *Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth (c)*. Though you are absolved from eternal condemnation; yet your sins may cost you dear here in this world. God may make them bitter to you by some smart affliction, or by troubles and terrors of conscience.

Exhort. 3. Reverence and adore the justice and righteousness of God in all his dealings with you, and particularly in cross and afflicting dispensations. His dispensations must needs be just, seeing his nature is so. So doth the psalmist argue: *Righteous art thou, O Lord; and upright are thy judgments (d)*. He cannot act contrary to his nature. He that is Justice and Righteousness itself, cannot possibly do any thing unjust: *The just Lord will not do iniquity (e)*. His dispensations toward you may be very smart and afflicting; but they are always just. Therefore,

1. Silence

(a) Psal. iv. 4. (b) Eccl. xi. 9. (c) Prov. xi. 31. (d) Psal. cxix. 137. (e) Zeph. iii. 5.

1. Silence your murmurings. These are evils which our corrupt natures are very prone unto. But all murmuring is an implicit accusation of the great God, as if he were in the wrong, and dealt unjustly. Men do thereby say, *the way of the Lord is not equal* (f). Therefore, under your heaviest afflictions, silence your murmuring and disputing, and rebuke the winds and waves of discontent that toss your soul. God takes it ill when you quarrel any of his ways; as is implied in that expostulation, *Hear now, O house of Israel, is not my way equal* (g)? It ill becomes you to quarrel or find fault, whatever be God's way toward you. 2. Own and acknowledge the justice and righteousness of God. The people of God own this with respect to their long captivity: *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us*. And again, *The Lord is righteous*. And also the prophet Daniel: *O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee: And the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doth* (h). And own his righteousness from the heart. It must not be by word of mouth only, but must be the real language of your heart. When you justify God, this will give check to your murmurings. And it is much for God's honour; for hereby you *justify him when he speaketh*, or threateneth judgment, and *clear him of any wrong dealing, when he judgeth*, or executeth judgment (i).

To engage you to all this, consider, 1. God's sovereignty. He is your sovereign Lord, and therefore hath right to dispose of you and yours according to his own pleasure. *Behold he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What dost thou* (k)? There is no tribunal before which you can cite God to answer for any of his dispensations. *He giveth not account of any of his matters* (l). Every man may do with his own what he pleaseth, and why may not the Lord do so? Shall we deny to him the common privilege of all proprietors? He is the potter and we are the clay. Do what he will, he doth us no wrong, because he hath supreme and absolute right over us and ours. Therefore say with Eli, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good* (m). And follow the psalmist's example: *I was dumb*, says he, *I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it* (n). 2. Consider your own guiltiness. God never afflicts without cause: At least there is always sin enough in us to justify his way toward us. It is on this ground that the saints give him the honour of his justice under their afflictions, in the texts already

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(f) Ezek. xviii. 25. (g) Ezek. xviii. 25. (h) Neh. ix. 33.
Lam. i. 18. Dan. ix. 7, 14. (i) Psal. li. 4. (k) Job. ix. 12.
(l) Job xxxiii. 13. (m) 1 Sam. iii. 18. (n) Psal. xxxix. 9.

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quoted. Hence Elihu pleads for God, *Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity: For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways (o)*. The consideration of your great guiltiness should stop your murmurings: *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins (p)?* Whatever you suffer, you suffer justly; so that you can complain of none but yourselves. Yea, your afflictions are always short of the cause. God *exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth (q)*. Therefore say with Ezra, *Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve (r)*. When God laid on a heavy cross, he might have cast you into hell. You are such guilty creatures, that God cannot put you in a worse condition than you deserve. Therefore, say with the church, *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not (s)*. 3. Consider his infinite wisdom. He is infinitely wise, and knoweth what is good for you, and how to carve out your lot for you, better than you do yourselves. And he hath infinitely wise reasons for all that he doth. Therefore you should own the equity and wisdom of his dispensations, though you cannot see the reasons of them. God's judgments are a great deep (t): And you are short-sighted creatures; your capacity is very shallow: Therefore believe that he is righteous, contrary to present appearance, as the prophet did, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: Yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments (u)*. And on the depth of his wisdom: Rather accuse yourselves of blindness, than God of injustice.

Again, own and reverence the justice and righteousness of God in his dealings with this land and the church of God in it, and in the present frowning aspect of his dispensations. If he remove eminent and worthy instruments; if he take away the hedge of his vineyard, and suffer it to be troden down; if he suffer the wild beast to waste and devour it; if he bring the light of the glorious gospel under a sad eclipse; if he turn us back to the wilderness again; if he say to the bloody sword, "Sword, go through the land, and cut off man and beast in it;" if he call for famine or pestilence to devour us, all will be most just. We have deserved no less: For we are a sinful people; our abominations are great, and many, and highly aggravated. Therefore let us justify God, and take shame to ourselves: We have provoked him by our shameful iniquities: So that we should say, *The Lord is righteous; but we have rebelled against his commandment (x)*.

Further,

(o) Job xxxiv. 10, 11. (p) Lam. iii. 39. (q) Job xi. 6. (r) Ezra ix. 13. (s) Lam. iii. 22. (t) Psal. xxxvi. 6. (u) Jer. xii. 1. (x) Lam. i. 18.

Further, own, adore, and praise the justice and righteousness of God, in his judgments upon the enemies of the church. We have a pattern for this in the song of the church, delivered from the tyranny of antichrist: *They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. And, Allelujah, salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore (y).*

Exhort. 4. Imitate God in this: Study to be just and righteous as he is: For if ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doth righteousness, is born of him. And, *He that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous (z).* And,

1. Be just toward God. *Render unto God the things that are God's (a).* Now you yourselves and all that you have are his*. Nothing you have is your own. They were rebels against God who said, *Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?* Therefore give yourselves to him. The Macedonians were exemplary in this: *They first gave their own selves to the Lord (b).* Give your hearts to him. This he calls for, *My Son, give me thine heart (c).* And give your bodies also: *Offer up your bodies a living sacrifice to God (d).* In a word, all you have must be consecrated to God, to be employed in his service, and for his honour and glory: According to that prophecy, *In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem, and in Judah, shall be Holiness unto the Lord of hosts (e).* It is a sacrilegious injustice, to keep back any thing from God. Again, you owe him all your service and obedience, in its utmost extent, and with the greatest intenseness of heart and affection. Let him have his due: *Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart (f).* Again, every mercy brings you under debt to God for thankful returns: And it is a great sin, when your returns are not some way proportioned to the mercies you have received. This brought wrath upon good king Hezekiah: *He rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him;—therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem (g).* Once more, every vow and promise makes you a debtor to God; and if it be unjust not to pay your debt to man, it is much more so, not to pay your debt to God. Therefore, *Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God (h).*

2. Be

(y) Rev. xv. 3. & xix. 12. (z) 1 John ii. 29. & iii. 7. (a) Mat. xxii. 21.

* *Nesciunt suis parcere qui nihil suum norunt.* Ambros.

(b) 2 Cor. viii. 5. (c) Prov. xxiii. 26. (d) Rom. xii. 1. (e) Zech. xiv. 20, 21. (f) 1 Sam. xii. 24. (g) 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. (h) Psal. lxxvi. 11.

2. Be just toward man. And that, 1. In your private dealings. 2. In your public administrations.

(1.) Be just in your private dealings. *Render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour (i).* Whether this due arise, 1. By virtue of the law of God: So, honour is due to parents, tribute to magistrates, &c. In which things the obligation cannot be made void. Or, 2. By way of bargain and contract. So, what is borrowed ought to be restored; and the labourer's hire ought to be duly paid; to keep it back is a crying sin (k). Or, 3. By a voluntary promise in things lawful, whereby men make themselves debtors. It is the character of one that hath communion with God in ordinances, and shall have communion with him in glory, that *he sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not (l).*

Further, do injury to no man, neither in his person, nor in his name, nor in his estate or goods. *Do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow (m).* In a word, observe that golden rule, *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: For this is the law and the prophets (n).*

To excite and engage you to be just in your private dealings with men, consider, 1. This is honourable. Righteousness is a part of God's image in man. The new man is *created after God in righteousness (o).* Therefore, the more just and righteous, the more like God. 2. This is *very pleasing to God. He loveth him that followeth after righteousness. And, To do justice and judgment, is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (p).* And without this, nothing you do can be pleasing to him, no not your most solemn duties of worship. God would not accept of his peoples' peace-offerings, *till judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream (q).* And he rejected the Jewish fasts, because they did not *loose the bands of wickedness, and undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free (r).* Iniquity in traffic and commerce is hateful to God. *All that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto him: And, diverse weights, and diverse measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord (s).* 3. Justice and righteousness in our dealings with men is a credit to religion. It is lovely in the eyes of the world, as injustice is odious and hateful to men. It is the support of human society, and commerce between man and man. *These things*

are

(i) Rom. xiii. 7. (k) Deut. xxiv. 14, 15. James v. 4. (l) Psal. xv. 4. (m) Jer. xxii. 3. (n) Matth. vii. 12. (o) Eph. iv. 24. (p) Prov. xv. 9. and xxi. 3. (q) Amos v. 22, 23, 24. (r) Isa. lviii. 5, 6. (s) Deut. xxv. 15, 16. Prov. xx. 10.

are good and profitable unto men (t). So that, to do justly is the way to adorn religion, and to represent our profession with advantage unto the consciences of men. Professors of religion, that deal unrighteously, are a reproach to the gospel of Christ, and harden profane men. 4. Righteousness in your dealings will be profitable to yourselves. It is the way to a blessing: For *blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doth righteousness at all times (u)*. Moses tells us that this is a mean of happy prosperity and success. *That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, says he, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (x)*. A little gotten by just dealing is better than much gotten by fraud and injustice. *Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right; and a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked (y)*. The comfort of what you have, lies not in abundance, but in God's blessing. On the contrary, unjust and unrighteous dealing will bring a moth on your estate. *An ill won penny, we use to say, will bring down a pound. He that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, consulteth shame to his house, and sinneth against his own soul (z)*. God doth not suffer men to hold what they have gotten unjustly: As Zophar says of the unjust man, *He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again; God shall cast them out of his belly (a)*. And unrighteousness exposeth to wrath and vengeance. The apostle, on this ground, dissuades from it: *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such (b)*.

Well then, beware of all unrighteous dealing, cheating, defrauding, extortion, forestalling, regretting, and other such evils. Make conscience of justice and equity in your dealings. Observe the rules of justice in lesser, as well as in greater matters: For he that is unfaithful in little, will be unfaithful also in much. Deal not unjustly upon any temptation whatsoever. Let not hope of gain move you to it: For there is no profit in what is gained unjustly: It is a certain loss, and will prove so in the issue.

(2.) Be just in your public administrations: Ye that are in places of power and trust. Magistrates and judges should deal justly. *He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God (c)*. See and ponder three texts of scripture. One is Moses' exhortation to the judges in his time: *Hear the causes between*

(t) Titus iii. 8. (u) Psal. cvi. 3. (x) Deut. xvi. 20. (y) Prov. xvi. 8. and xxxvii. 16. (z) Hab. ii. 9, 10.

(a) Job xx. 15. (b) 1 Theff. iv. 6. (c) 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.

between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment, but you shall hear the small as well as the great: Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man: For the judgment is God's (d)*. Another is Jehoshaphat's exhortation to the judges in his time: Take heed what ye do: For ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: For there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (e). The third text is a terrible wo denounced against unrighteous rulers and judges. Wo unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed: To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people; that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. And what will ye do in the day of visitation, &c (f). Magistrates, rulers and judges, are called gods. God hath put his own name upon them; therefore they should study to be like God, in observing the rule of justice and righteousness in their administrations. This is much for the glory of God, the good of his people, and their own peace; and the reward of such will be great.

(d) Deut. i. 16, 17.

* *Iustitia non novit patrem vel matrem: Veritatem novit; personam non novit: Deum imitatur.* Cassian.

(e) 2 Chron. xix. 6, 7.

(f) Isa. x. 1, 2, 3.

DISCOURSE X.

Of the Patience of God.

SERMON XLIV.

Rom. ii. 4. *Or despisest thou the riches of his——forbearance and long-suffering.*

IN the four first chapters of this epistle, the apostle treats of the cause of our justification before God; and proves that we are justified, not upon the account of our own righteousness and good works, but upon the account of the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone. This he proves by this argument, that men have no righteousness of their own to justify them, seeing all are unrighteous; which he clears and illustrates with reference, both to the Gentiles and to the Jews.

Jews. He begins with the Gentiles, in the preceding chapter, from the 18th verse and downward, where he shews that the Gentiles imprisoned and suppressed the truth; that is, these natural nations they had of their duty to God and their neighbour, that they might sin the more freely: For which, God in his just judgment, gave them up to gross sins, such as abominable idolatry, and the filthy lusts of all uncleanness. And then, from the beginning of this chapter, and downward, he vindicates the justice and righteousness of God, in such judgments on wicked sinners; and particularly, on such sinners as are themselves guilty of the same sins, for which they judge and censure others, and abuse and misinterpret the goodness and patience of God toward them.

For the subject of my discourse, I pitch only on these words, by which the patience of God toward sinners is expressed, *The riches of his forbearance and long-suffering*. *Forbearance* and *long-suffering*, are different words here used to express the same thing, to wit, the patience of God. God's patience, whether it be exercised for a shorter, or for a longer time, is called *forbearance*; but *long-suffering* is a further degree of patience and forbearance. When God hath long patience, or when his patience is lengthened out, then it is called *long-suffering*. But here we have also *the riches of his forbearance and long-suffering*. *Riches*; that is, great abundance. His patience is admirably great: He is, as it were, enriched with it. There are riches of divine patience that none can count the value of; and a depth in these riches that none can fathom. They are indeed unsearchable riches.

The doctrine I propose is this:

Admirable patience is one of God's glorious excellencies.

His patience is his riches. He is rich in his forbearance and long-suffering. How great then must it be! We may and ought to admire it, but cannot comprehend it.

I shall here endeavour to shew,

1. *That God is patient; or, patience is one of his glorious perfections.*
2. *What the patience of God is; or, what is the nature of this divine perfection.*
3. *Wherein the patience of God is exercised.*
4. *Whence the admirable riches and greatness of his patience doth appear.*
5. *What are the properties of God's patience.*
6. *Why he exerciseth such patience.*
7. *I shall apply the whole.*

First, I shew that God is patient; or, patience is one of his glorious perfections. We find it often attributed to God in scripture, under a variety of expressions. It is often expressed by a *slowness to anger* (a); importing that God doth not presently pour out his wrath on such as provoke him. In my text it is expressed by *forbearance*. He forbears punishment, notwithstanding of the sins of men. And it is expressed by *long-suffering* (b), which is a lengthening out of patience. This is one of the remarkable letters in God's name, as he himself proclaimed it before Moses. God suffers, and bears long with sinners. It is long before he draw out the sword of justice against them. It is also expressed by his *keeping silence*: *These things hast thou done*, says the Lord, *and I kept silence* (c). "I did not speak to thee by providential rebukes, or in my wrath" and displeasure; I did not presently call thee to account."

Further, that God is patient, appears, 1. Because he is the Governor of the world. Patience is necessary to fit men for government: Therefore it must be a necessary perfection of him who is the supreme Governor, considering that *the whole world lies in wickedness* (d). God would be incapable to govern it, if he had not patience to bear with the sins and follies of men. Without this, he would in a moment destroy the world. 2. Patience is so necessary a perfection of God, that the glory of his other perfections would be much obscured without it. Were it not for his patience, how could his wisdom be glorified in bringing good out of evil, and so much good out of so great an evil as sin is? If he presently executed deserved wrath upon the enemies of the church, how would his power be glorified, in preserving his people in the hot furnace of affliction? And how would his wisdom in contriving, and his power in accomplishing their deliverance, be visible and conspicuous to the world? And without the exercise of patience, how would the equity of his justice be manifest and unquestionable? If he were not patient toward sinners, he might seem to be cruel to them. 3. How many proofs of the divine patience have we in his providential works? What admirable patience appears, in God's bearing with our first parents, when they turned rebels against him? The creatures were continued for their use and service, the earth did not swallow them up, they were not presently thrust down to hell, as they de-

(a) Neh. ix. 17. Psal. ciii. 8. Nah. i. 3.
1 Pet. iii. 20. 2 Pet. iii. 9, 10. Exod. xxxiv. 6.
(d) 1 John v. 19.

(b) Psal. cxlv. 8.
(c) Psal. l. 21.

deserved. Yea, Adam's life was continued for the space of 930 years after his rebellion. The children of Israel were a stiff-necked people: Though they grieved God forty years together in the wilderness, yet *he suffered their manners* (e). And though afterward they did often rebel against him, and were guilty of the highest provocations, and abused the most astonishing goodness; yet God exercised admirable patience toward them. He *sent unto them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending* (f); and waited long for their repentance, before he brought his desolating judgments upon them. And doth not admirable patience appear in his dealing with the Gentiles? The chapter preceding my text gives some account what they were. They were sunk in idolatry and superstition, soaked in all manner of wickedness, and filled with all unrighteousness: Yet *God winked at these times of ignorance* (g). He exercised such admirable patience, that he seemed to take no notice of them. And at this day, though the world lies in wickedness, yet it is not destroyed. Considering the abominations it is filled with, is it not a wonder that it hath not been consumed long ere now? How can we shun to cry out, O the admirable patience of God! 4. The very heathens wanted not a sense of the divine patience. This they expressed by feigning their god Saturn to be bound a whole year in a soft cord. As also by this proverb: *The mills of the gods grind slowly*. The mills being usually turned by such as for some transgression were condemned to that work; the meaning is, that God doth not punish men so severely as they deserve. Particularly, Plutarch hath an excellent discourse of the patience of God toward sinners.

Second, I shall next shew, What the patience of God is; or, what is the nature of this divine perfection.

Patience, in the very notation of the word *, imports *suffering*. In this sense it is not in God, the divine nature being incapable of suffering. But as it signifies a willingness to defer the execution of deserved wrath, it is a perfection of the divine nature.

It is that perfection of God whereby he hath power over his anger to moderate it toward sinful guilty creatures. Here let us consider, 1. The nature of it. 2. The object of it.

1. The nature of it lies in the power that God hath over his

(e) Acts xiii. 18. (f) 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15. (g) Acts xvii. 30.

* *Quomodo enim patientia vim suam nomenque retineret, si nihil esset quod pati cogeremur.* Lactan. Lib. 5. De Justitia.

his anger to moderate it. Hence it is said, *The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power (h)*. As it is an argument of great weakness in men, when they are not able to bridle their passion; so, he hath a great power over himself, who can rule his own spirit, and keep his passions under government, under great provocations. *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty: And he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city (i)*. So here, God hath an infinite power over himself, to moderate and restrain his anger, and to bear with great provocations, without a speedy revenge. Therefore, when Moses pleads for the exercise of God's patience toward the Israelites, he expresseth himself thus: *And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy (k)*. So that the divine patience is a power and ability in God to moderate and restrain his anger: Or, the divine nature considered as able to forbear the execution of that punishment upon sinners which they justly deserve. And when God actually restrains his anger, and forbears deserved punishment, this is his patience in the exercise of it. Hence we may see a difference between God's patience and his mercy; patience spares the sinner, and mercy relieves him in his misery. So that patience comes in, as it were, between justice and mercy. 1. It silences justice. Hence is that expression, *I kept silence (l)*. I did not speak unto thee in my wrath. The justice of God is his sword, and patience is as it were the sheath of it. Therefore when the time of God's patience is expired, he is said to *draw forth his sword out of its sheath (m)*. 2. It ushers in mercy, and prepares the way for the exercise thereof. Therefore it is placed in the first rank: *The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy (n)*. There would be no place for mercy, if patience did not prepare the way. *He waits that he may be gracious (o)*. Patience spares the sinner, that mercy may relieve him.

2. The object of it is sinful guilty men. 1. Men are the objects of divine patience, and not fallen angels, nor brute creatures. For, *God spared not the angels that sinned (p)*; and brute creatures cannot offend God by sin, and therefore are not liable to any punishment; so that they are not objects of divine patience. God's sparing them for the use and service of man, is a testimony of his patience towards man, rather than toward

(h) Nah i. 3. (i) Prov. xvi. 32. (k) Numb. xiv. 17. (l) Psal. l. 21. (m) Ezek. xxi. 3. (n) Numb. xiv. 18. (o) Isa. xxx. 18. (p) 2 Pet. ii. 4.

toward them. Hence we may see how God's patience differs from his goodness. His patience is a branch of his goodness, so that his goodness is of greater extent and latitude. All the creatures are objects of divine goodness; *the Lord is good to all (q)*: but man only is the object of divine patience. 2. It is not men as such simply, but sinful guilty men, that are the objects of divine patience. If sin had not entered into the world, there had been no place for the exercise of patience. And here we have another difference between God's goodness and his patience. Though man had not sinned, but stood firm in his first estate; yet he had been an object of divine goodness, but not of patience. So that goodness respects persons as creatures; patience respects them as transgressors. We see also how God's patience differs from his mercy; for though the material object of both be the same, to wit, sinful man; yet not under the same formal consideration. Man, as miserable, is the object of mercy; but man, as criminal, is the object of patience. 3. Not only some sinful men, but all, are the objects of divine patience. There is not a man in the world but hath had divine patience exercised toward him. Particularly, God is patient, (1.) Towards his own children. He bears with them, notwithstanding of their manifold sins, passeth by their infirmities and weaknesses, and *s pares them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him (r)*. His patience is admirable, in bearing with them after he hath so highly obliged them. This is one end why he suffers sin still to remain in them, that he may have occasion of manifesting his great patience toward them. (2.) Toward the elect not yet converted. The apostle Paul was an eminent instance of divine patience and long-suffering. *Howbeit, says he, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (s)*. All that time wherein the elect are going on in a course of rebellion against God, he bears with them. Hence the apostle exhorts believers to *account that God's long-suffering is salvation (t)*. Believers owe their salvation to God's patience toward them before their conversion. (3.) Toward them that perish. He *endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (u)*. That reprobate sinners are so long out of hell; that they are reprieved for so many days and years from everlasting torments; that they are so long under the rich offers of

(q) Psal. cxlv. 9.

(r) Mal. iii. 17.

(s) 1 Tim. i. 16.

(t) 2 Pet. iii. 15.

(u) Rom. ix. 22.

of Christ and his grace, all this is wholly owing to divine patience.

Thirdly, I go on to shew wherein the patience of God is exercised. In general, the time of this life is the only time for the exercise of it. Of all the other perfections of the divine nature, this perfection of patience hath the shortest time wherein to act its part. The power of God will be exerted in the world to come, in punishing the damned, in upholding the new heaven and earth, and the rational creatures in their beings. His goodness and mercy have a heaven, and his justice and holiness a hell, wherein to display themselves to eternity: but his patience hath no other stage but this world whereon to act. After this world is at an end, it will remain shut up in the Deity, without any further operation. The time of this life is the only time of long-suffering.

Particularly, divine patience is exercised or manifested,

1. In his unwillingness to execute judgment. *He doth not afflict willingly (x).* Orig. *He doth not afflict from the heart*; that is, not with delight and pleasure. Only know, that afflictions may be considered, either in their own nature, or as means in order to some blessed end. As afflicting providences are necessary means of vindicating the justice and holiness of God, and of awakening people to repentance; so God may be said to afflict willingly, and with pleasure and delight: but consider affliction in its own nature, as it is grievous to man, so God doth not afflict willingly; he hath no delight in it; he doth not afflict till he is provoked. Mercy is his proper natural work; it flows from himself, without any cause in the creature: Hence he is said to *delight in mercy*. But judgment is *his strange work*, and *strange act (y)*: he doth not proceed to it, till he is provoked by the sins of men.

2. In giving warning before he execute judgment. *Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, (to wit, in a way of judgment) but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets (z)* He doth not punish hastily, or in a passion, but warns before he strikes. The Old Testament is full of presages and warnings of approaching judgments. There were two famous destructions of Jerusalem, the one by the Chaldeans, the other by the Romans: God gave warning of both; of the first, by Jeremiah and other prophets; of the last, by Christ himself (a). Again, there are two general destructions of the world; the one past, by

(x) Lam. iii. 33. (y) Micah vii. 19. Isa. xxviii. 21. (z) Amos iii. 7.

(a) Luke xix. 43, 44.

by water, to cool the heat of lust that then was; the other to come, by fire, for the coldness of love among men; and in scripture we find sufficient warnings given of both. God gives warning, by the threatenings contained in the holy scriptures; by his word in the mouth of his ordinary ambassadors; by lesser judgments, which are usual trumpeters of greater; and by signs, and wonders, and extraordinary operations in the works of nature. God never executes judgment, till he hath first threatened it, either against the people that provoke him, or against them that were their forerunners in the same, or like provocations.

3. In forbearing the execution of deserved wrath. *Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily (b).* God delays so long as the honour of his name will permit. He bears till he can bear no longer. He doth many a time turn his anger away (c). He waited on the old world 120, before he brought the flood upon them. God is slow to anger, even when he is much provoked. When he might justly cast sinners into hell so soon as they sin against him, yet he defers his anger.

4. In continuing to use proper means for reclaiming sinners and gaining their hearts to him. He calls them to repentance, for preventing the execution of judgment; and calls frequently. He makes repeated offers of himself and his grace to sinners, and *stretcheth out his hand all the day long*. He stands knocking at their door, though they do not open at first (d). Though he meet with many refusals, yet he persists in his kind suit, and continues courting and wooing their hearts, and doth not give over. O admirable patience!

5. In executing judgment by degrees. He doth not send his judgments all at once, but one after another; they are as the morning light, that goeth forth gradually (e). When he destroyed the old world, he made not the heaven pour out on a sudden, but the rain increased by degrees forty days and forty nights, till it came to a height. God is slow in his works of judgment, waiting if sinners will repent; as the glory of God, in Ezekiel's vision, departed by so many steps and degrees, as if he had a mind to be invited back again.

6. In moderating and mitigating his judgments. He *doth not stir up all his wrath*. When he doth afflict, it is always *less than our iniquities do deserve (f)*: So that there is patience manifested

(b) Eccl. viii. 11. (c) Jer. xlv. 22. Psal. lxxviii. 38. 1 Pet. iii. 20. (d) See Jer. iii. 7, 12, 14, 22. Ezek. xviii. 30, 31, 32. Isa. lvi. 2. Rev. iii. 20. (e) Hos. vi. 5. (f) Psal. lxxviii. 38. Ezra ix. 13.

manifested in every cross a man meets with, because it is much less than is deserved. God *stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind* (g). When he might justly consume a whole city or country, and burn all to ashes, *the fire doth but consume a part* (h).

S E R M O N XLV.

Fourthly, **I** Proceed to shew whence the admirable riches and greatness of divine patience doth appear. It is indeed admirably rich, rich to astonishment, as will appear from these considerations.

1. Consider what a great evil there is in sin. Even the best of men see but little of it. Sin is most opposite and contrary to God, to his being, to his nature, to all his glorious perfections. There is *enmity against God* in the very nature of it (a). It strikes against all his attributes. We deny his sovereignty, when we violate his laws; we disgrace his holiness, when we cast our filth before his face; we disparage his wisdom, when we prefer our own will to his; we slight his goodness, when we judge it not strong enough to draw our hearts to him. How admirable is the patience of God in bearing with such an evil as this is! Though all God's attributes solicit for wrath and vengeance against sinners, yet divine patience stands in the gap to keep off judgment.

2. Consider God's omniscience. He sees and knows all the sins of men; the number, nature, and aggravations of them. He knows all the sinful thoughts, words, and actions of all the men in the world. Hence he tells that people, *I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins: And I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them* (b). He perfectly understands the greatness of his own majesty that is vilified, and the nature of the offence committed against him. All the circumstances of sin; yea, all the secret and retired wickedness in the heart: All are *naked*, ript up, and anatomized before him (c). Now, that God forbears to punish sinners, though he perfectly sees and knows all their sins; what admirable patience is this!

3. Consider the infinite holiness of God, and how hateful sin is to him. He is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity*. Sin is called *that abominable thing that he hates* (d). He cannot but hate it. His hatred of sin is essential to

(g) Isa. xxvii. 8. (h) Amos vii. 4.

(a) Rom. viii. 7. (b) Amos v. 12 Ezek. xi. 5. (c) Heb. iv. 13.

(d) Hab. i. 13. Jer. xlv. 4.

to him; it is his very nature. And he *cannot look* on it. The purity of his nature is averse from beholding it. He hates it with a perfect and infinite hatred. No comparison can serve to set forth his indignation against sin. Now, the contrariety of sin to the holiness of God renders his patience very admirable. How wonderful is it, that he should so long forbear to punish what is so hateful to him? O the riches of his forbearance! His patience doth infinitely transcend the patience of men and angels, seeing he is infinitely more sensible of the cursed nature and quality of sin than they are.

4. Consider his power to punish. He hath power to avenge himself when he pleaseth. It is not because his arm cannot reach sinners, that he forbears to smite them; for he can, by a word, crush all mankind in a moment: As he created the world by a word in six days, so he can easily dissolve the whole frame of it in a moment. Here is the great wonder, though he be *great in power*, yet he is *slow to anger* (e). Though he can, yet he will not punish.

5. Consider toward whom he exerciseth his patience. He exerciseth it, 1. Toward such whom he hath infinitely obliged, and loaded with his benefits. O, how great is his patience, in bearing with them on whom he hath heaped many obligations, even by such mercies as deserve a special remark! All the unkindness and ingratitude of sinners doth not break his patience. 2. Toward the vilest and worst of sinners; such as are black as hell, guilty of innumerable sins, and sins of a hainous nature, and highly aggravated; being committed against light, vows, mercies, checks of conscience, and manifold rebukes and warnings. O admirable patience, that God should bear with such sinners!

6. Consider what a multitude of provocations he meets with. The sins of any one man are past reckoning. Not a member of the body, or faculty of the soul, but hath been the instrument of innumerable sins. There is a *world of iniquity* in the tongue (f): and so there is in the eyes, hands, feet; in the mind, will and affections. Yea, the best men cannot tell how often they have offended: *Who can understand his errors* (g)? So that every man may justly stand amazed at the patience of God toward him. No man can compute the vast number of his sins for the space of one day; much less the sins committed in a month, or in a year. O then what a multitude of sins must one profane sinner be guilty of, in the space of thirty, fifty, or

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A a a

seventy

(e) Nah. i. 3.

(f) James iii. 6.

(g) Psal. xix. 12.

seventy years ! But what are the sins of one man to those of a great city, such as this is ? And what are the sins of this city, to those of the whole nation ? And what are these to those of the whole world ? O, what an astonishing patience must it be that bears with all this ! O the riches of his forbearance and long-suffering !

7. Consider how patiently he bears with the many affronts sinners put upon his grace, and the many denials and repulses his gracious offers meet with. The slighting and rejecting of an offered Christ, is a sin of a horrid and black nature, being an undervaluing of him, and a horrid contempt of the infinite wisdom and grace of God : yet he bears with it. There are some among you who have often made light of Christ, slighted his grace, despised his offers, trampled upon his blood, stifled many motions of the Spirit, and convictions of conscience ; yet he hath borne with all this. He hath not only forborne the execution of deserved wrath, but gives renewed and repeated offers of Christ and his grace. He bears all, and waits patiently. We, upon every affront offered to us, are ready to call for fire from heaven to avenge it ; but he bears with many an affront at your hand. O astonishing patience !

8. Consider how long his patience is lengthened out. 1. He bears long with nations. He bore forty years with the rebellious Israelites, and *suffered their manners in the wilderness (h)*. He bore 120 years with the old world. And, since that time, though the whole world hath been lying in wickedness, yet he hath borne with all the nations these several thousands of years past. What astonishing patience is it, that endures the contradictions and monstrous wickedness of a sinful world for so long a time ? 2. He bears long with particular persons, though not so long usually as with nations. How great a favour must it be to be reprieved from everlasting burnings, for the space of forty, or fifty, or sixty years, for many hainous offences committed against God ? How many have lived till they were old and gray-headed in sin, before grace brought them to a surrender ? O unparalleled patience, that did bear with them all that time !

There are two things that manifest the admirable greatness of divine patience. God doth not punish, 1. Till sin be ripe : and that usually takes a time. The sin of the Amorites was 900 years a ripening. God doth not put in the sickle, till sinners are ripe for judgment (*i*). He went down to see whether Sodom had *done altogether* according to the cry of their sin (*k*).

Orig.

(*h*) Acts xiii. 18. (*i*) Rev. xiv. 18. (*k*) Gen. xviii. 21.

Orig. whether they had made a *consummation*, &c. That is, whether their iniquities were full and ripe: whereby God shewed his purpose to spare them till it was so. 2. Till sin have a loud cry. The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was *great* (l). Had not Sodom's sin cried importunately, God had not answered it. Mercy persuades him to spare sinners, if the cry of their sin did not constrain him to punish them. Sin cries loud and long before God takes the sword of justice in his hand.

Fifthly, I come next to assign some properties of God's patience. They are generally evident from what hath been said.

1. It is a powerful patience. The patience of God is not an effect of impotency, or want of opportunity; but a glorious effect of his power. Hence it is said, *The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power*: And, *To make his power known, he endures with much long-suffering* (m). God is not impotent, as one that is at the command of his passions: So that his patience is not a patience per force, but such as proceeds from *the riches of his goodness* (n).

2. It is a knowing and sensible patience. The patience of God doth not proceed from ignorance, or weakness of resentment, or stupidity under the affronts offered him. No, no; he knows and is sensible of all the wrongs done to him by sin. Hence he says of that wicked people, *They have committed villany in Israel,—I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord* (o). He is infinitely more sensible of the cursed nature of sin, than all men and angels can be.

3. It is an abundant patience. Hence we read, in my text, of *the riches of his forbearance and long-suffering*; and elsewhere, of *much long-suffering, and all long-suffering* (p). So that the patience of God is abundant, rich, and copious, considering the manifold objects of it, to wit, all men in all ages; and considering the innumerable provocations he meets with from every man. O the abundance and riches of his patience!

4. It is a just patience. He doth not repeal the sentence passed against sin, but only suspends the execution of it. *Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily* (q). Though justice is so natural to God, that he cannot but punish sin; yet he is a free Agent, and may delay the punishment for a time, for just and wise reasons. Again, it is a just patience, because the time of his patience will have an end. Though God be long-suffering, yet he is not ever-suffering. Abused patience will at last

(l) Gen. xviii. 20. (m) Nah i. 3. Rom. ix. 22. (n) Rom. ii. 4. (o) Jer. xxix. 23. (p) Rom. ix. 22. 1 Tim. i. 16. (q) Eccl. viii. 11.

last give way to justice, and demand to be righted by it, and render it the more illustrious: For when justice demands the debt from sinners, patience also will have a claim for long forbearance.

5. It is a holy patience. Sinners take occasion from God's patience, to charge him with impurity, as if he were an abettor of, and a consort in their sins. When *God keepeth silence*, they *think that he is altogether such an one as themselves* (r). But though God spare sinners, yet his hatred is edged against their sins, and his heart lothes every one of their abominations. He doth not by his patience, either blemish the holiness of his nature, or dispense with the holiness of his law. His hatred of sin is infinite: Yet he hath a liberty to restrain the effects of his displeasure against it, for wise ends, without any disgrace to his holiness.

Sixthly, Let me shew, why God exerciseth such patience. He doth so for these reasons:

1. To shew that he is God and not man. His patience and long-suffering is an attribute very expressive of his nature. It is a part of his glory: Therefore when he proclaimed his glory before Moses, this is brought in: *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering* (s). Yea, he glories in it as peculiar to himself: *I will not execute the fierceness of my anger*, says he; *I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man* (t). God shews himself to be God, as well by sparing, as by punishing. It is well for poor sinners, that they have to do with God, and not with man, in their miscarriages. No mere man, though as holy as an angel, could exercise such patience toward sinners as God doth.

2. To manifest and shew forth his gracious, merciful, and reconcileable nature. For this end he exercised so much patience and long-suffering toward Paul, *that in him Christ Jesus might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting* (u). That is, that he might be a pattern of Christ's patience to other sinners: To let them understand, that neither the greatness, nor the multitude of their sins, should be a bar to his mercy and grace, if they would believe on his name. He exerciseth great patience toward sinners, to let them know, that they may find grace in his sight on gracious terms, whatsoever their sins have been. His patience is a witness of his tenderness, and readiness to shew mercy on terms of grace.

3. That

(r) Psal. l. 21. (s) Exod. xxxiv. 6. (t) Hos. xi. 9. (u) 1 Tim. i. 16.

3. That the elect may be gathered in. As a woman condemned for a capital crime, is reprieved for the child's sake in her womb: So wicked men are spared a long time, for the elect's sake in their loins*; according to that promise, *Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: So will I do for my servant's sake, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountain: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servant shall dwell there (x).* Again, many of the elect, though born, are not yet converted, but lie hidden in the polluted mass of mankind; therefore they are spared, till God's time come for gaining and conquering their hearts. Hence, days of calamity and distress are shortened for the elect's sake (y). God will not waste and wear out a whole nation, because there are elect among them to be gathered in.

4. For his peoples' sake. As the tares are suffered to grow among the wheat, lest by plucking up the one, the other be plucked up also (z): So wicked men are spared, for the sake of the godly among them. Though the sins of Sodom cried aloud for vengeance, yet God would have spared it, if ten righteous persons had been found in it (a). The truly godly among a sinful people, are usually a bar to the execution of judgment. *God delivers the island of the innocent: and it is delivered by the pureness of their hands (b).* By their prayers, they set themselves in the breach at which divine wrath is ready to break in upon a sinful people: So did Moses; he stood before God in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy the children of Israel (c).

Again, God exerciseth great patience toward the wicked, for the good of his own people. As, 1. For their greater safety and security. As the chaff is a defence to the wheat, and thorns are used for a hedge to the vineyard; so God spares many wicked men and hypocrites, that they may be a fence to the church. *The earth helped the woman (d).* 2. That he may use them as rods to correct and chastise his people. They are *established for correction (e).* God lets enemies alone, till they have done his work, though they manage it with evil intentions. He will not cast the rod in the fire, till his people have felt the smart of

* *Nisi Deus expectaret impium, non inveniret quem glorificaret pium.* August.

(x) Isa. lxxv. 8, 9. (y) Matth. xxiv. 22. (z) Matth. xiii. 29, 30.

(a) Gen. xviii. 32. (b) Job xxii. 30. (c) Psal. cvi. 23.

(d) Rev. xiii. 16. (e) Hab. i. 13.

of it. 3. That he may use them for the exercise of his people. Hence David prays with respect to the church's enemies, *Slay them not, lest my people forget* (f). As standing water is apt to putrify; so constant peace and prosperity is apt to corrupt the best of men: Therefore God suffers wicked men to keep them in exercise; as Scipio would have Carthage to stand, to whet and exercise the Roman valour. 4. For the trial of his people's graces; especially their faith and patience. *Here is the patience and faith of the saints* (g). And God will have their graces tried and exercised, that the sincerity of them may be discovered, to his glory and their comfort; and that the wants and weaknesses of them may be discovered, for keeping them humble, and putting them upon a more constant and self-denied dependence on Christ.

5. To wait for the repentance of sinners, and that they may have time for it. Hence the Lord says of Jezebel, *I gave her space to repent. He waits that he may be gracious* (h). The time of this life is the only time for repentance: Therefore † God spares sinners, and doth not presently cut them off, that they may have a space to repent in. This is a favour he would not vouchsafe to the angels that sinned: *God spared them not, but cast them down to hell* (i).

6. To induce sinners to repentance, and to melt and break their hearts for their unkindness to him. Nothing doth more promote repentance and brokenness of heart for sin, than the consideration of God's admirable patience. The very natural tendency of such a treatment, is to mollify the hearts of sinners, and overcome their obstinacy: *It leadeth to repentance*:³ And *his long-suffering is salvation* (k); that is, it hath a tendency to salvation. It encourages sinners to sue for pardon on terms of grace. O what ingenuous relentings will there sometimes be in the hearts of sinners, under the apprehensions of the divine patience! "Though I have been a most provoking sinner, a desperate rebel against God, yet he hath spared me hitherto; though I have long abused his patience, yet his patience is lengthened out, when he might justly have cast me into hell long ere now: Alas, that I have so offended and dishonoured such a patient God!"

7. To clear and justify God, and render obstinate sinners the more inexcusable, when he comes to reckon with them.

The

(f) Psal. lix. 11. (g) Rev. xiii. 10. (h) Rev. ii. 21. Isa. xxx. 18.

† *Patientiam exercet suam, dum penitentiam expectat tuam.* Aug.

(i) 2 Pet. ii. 4. (k) Rom. ii. 4. 2 Pet. iii. 15.

The equity of divine justice will be more apparent, when his patience hath been abused and slighted. His wrath is more justified, when it is poured out on those whom he hath endured with much long-suffering. When God might justly punish for one sin, and yet bears with sinners for very many; if their hearts be not gained to him thereby, they will be the more inexcusable, and divine justice, in taking vengeance on them, will be the more illustrious. O what will sinners answer on the great day, when God shall say, "Did I not bear long with your rebellions? How long did I defer mine anger, though I was highly provoked? How long did I stand and knock at your door? How long did I wait for your repentance?" This will stop their mouth, and vindicate the justice of God. The sentence, as dreadful as it will be, will be applauded by men and angels, when pronounced against them whom God endured with much long-suffering.

8. To render mens' judgment the greater, if they be not led to repentance by his patience. The longer the sinner is spared, the more is his sin aggravated; and aggravated sins expose to more dreadful wrath. Sinners, by *despising the riches of divine forbearance and long-suffering, treasure up to themselves much wrath (l)*. God endures some sinners with much long-suffering, that he may magnify his wrath more upon them (*m*). The contempt of his patience and long-suffering ripens them the more for vengeance. How dreadful will their judgment be, when they must reckon, not only for former sins, but also for abused patience.

S E R M O N XLVI.

Seventhly, **I** Come, in the last place, to the application.

Use 1. It follows from this doctrine, that no man can judge of God's love simply by impunity: For God bears with the worst of men; he *endures with much long-suffering even the vessels of wrath (a)*. You may be vessels of wrath, though you be objects of much long-suffering. You may have space enough for repentance, and yet never get the grace of repentance. It is no sign you are innocent, because you are not punished. They may be reprieved for a time, who are never pardoned.

Use 2. For lamentation. Alas that God's patience is so much abused. How apt are men to take liberty to sin, because God forbears to punish them for it? *Because sentence against an* *vex*

(*l*) Rom. ii. 4, 5. (*m*) Rom. ix. 22. (*a*) Rom. ix. 22.

evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (b). God charges this upon the Jews: *Have not I held my peace, even of old, and thou fearest me not (c)?* God's silence was abused by them to impudence in their sins. How many abuse divine patience to atheism, as if God neglected the government of the lower world, or had forgotten the wrongs done to him by sin, or did approve the sins of men, and were as wicked as themselves (d). Hence, they grow more secure and hardened in their sinful courses. How many take liberty to go on in a course of sin, to reject the offers of Christ, and to delay and put off their obedience to the call of the gospel: Why? Because they find they have to do with a patient God, that bears with them, and doth not take these advantages against them, that he justly might take: as if they would put his patience to the utmost proof, and try how far it will go.

But such abuse of the divine patience is a very great evil. It is a great aggravation of sin, to sin against patience. The longer God bears with you, your sins receive the deeper aggravations. For, 1. Every act of divine patience and forbearance is an obligation to duty. If God's goodness to us, as creatures, be a great obligation, then his forbearance toward us, as sinners, is a more endearing argument: and consequently every act of his forbearance abused, increaseth our guilt. 2. Sinning under divine patience is an argument of great obstinacy in sin. To *despise the riches of God's forbearance (e)*, is an evidence of great hardness of heart. How hard and obstinate is that heart that will not be gained by such sweet and gentle methods? How deep and strong must corruption be, when so much patience cannot overcome it? 3. It is base and disingenuous ingratitude. How base is it to use him so ill, who bears so much and so long with you? How unworthy is it to abuse that patience that leads you to repentance, and by that to happiness? Is it not base, to wrong him the more, because he doth not right himself? 4. It is a contempt of God worse than that of devils. They are not capable of abusing divine patience as you are: *God spared not the angels that sinned (f)*. Though he spare them from their total punishment, yet it is not in order to their repentance, nor is it attended with any offers of mercy. They injure God under the inevitable strokes of his justice; but you wrong him under an amazing patience.

From

(b) Eccl. viii. 11. (c) Isa. lvii. 11. (d) Psal. l. 21. (e) Rom. ii. 4. (f) 2 Pet. ii. 4.

From all this it appears, that the abusing divine patience is a heinous sin: and it is also of dangerous consequence, upon such grounds as shall be afterward representen.

Use 3. For exhortation: In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Fret not at the prosperity of wicked men. God is pleased to exercise much patience toward them: but the time of his patience shall have an end, and then justice will avenge the abuse of long-suffering. Hence the psalmist exhorts us: *Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb (g).* Wicked men, in the height of their outward prosperity, are but like condemned malefactors, that are reprieved only during pleasure. There is a dreadful sentence over their heads, that stands unrepealed, and may be suddenly executed.

Exhort. 2. Admire the patience of God. It is matchless and incomparable.

1. Compare it with the patience of the holiest men on earth. Never was there a man like Moses, for meekness, patience, and long-suffering; yet he could not bear with the provocations of the Israelites: when they provoked his meek spirit, *he spake unadvisedly with his lips.* O how impatient was he? *Ye rebels, says he, must we fetch you water out of this rock?* And, in his passion, *he smote the rock twice (h).* Again, though the apostles, James and John, were good men, yet how ready were they to call for *fire from heaven* upon the Samaritans (*i*), because they refused to receive their Lord and Master? A slight affront, in comparison of what he receives from many among us. Mr. Bolton says, if the most tender-hearted man should sit but one hour in the throne of God, and look down on the earth, as God doth continually, and see what abominations are done in that hour, he would undoubtedly, in the next, set all the world on fire.

2. Compare it with the patience of angels. They could not bear with sinners as God doth. When God promised an angel to conduct the children of Israel into Canaan, and to drive out their enemies, and gave this reason why he declined to conduct them immediately by himself, lest their stubbornness should provoke him to destroy them, it is said, that *the people murmured at these evil tidings (k).* Why, what evil tidings were here? They knew, if God could not bear with their provoca-

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tions,

(g) Psal. xxxvii, 1, 2. (h) Numb. xii. 3. Psal. cvi. 33. Numb. xii. 10, 11. (i) Luke ix, 54. (k) Exod. xxxiii. 2, 4, 5.

tions, much less could angels; therefore, if a created angel be their guide, they must all perish. Hence it is, that as soon as God had proclaimed his name, *gracious and long-suffering*, Moses falls a praying, *Let my Lord, I pray thee, go amongst us; for it is a stiff-necked people (l)*. What an argument was this? Because none but God had the patience to bear with them. As if he had said, Though thou shouldest send the most tender-hearted angel in heaven to conduct them, they would be a lost people.

3- Compare it with the patience of the glorified saints. Though their patience be perfect in its kind, yet it is not like God's. The souls under the altar are a clear instance of this: They cried with a loud voice, saying, *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth (m)?* It is true, here was no sinful impatience; yet a patience infinitely short of the patience of God. The glorified saints are not so able to bear the slow pace of justice against the enemies of the church, as Christ is. If the government of the world had been committed to them, it had been at an end long ere now.

Well then, admire the patience of God: and admire it especially toward yourselves in particular. Consider, 1. God had not a minute's patience with the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell; yet he hath had long patience with you. He would not bear with the angels for one sin, nor allow them one moment's space for repentance: yet he hath borne with you for many sins, and sins of a deeper dye than the very devils are capable of; for they are not capable of sinning against gospel-grace, and against the blood of Christ, as you do. 2. Many of your acquaintances and companions in sin, have been surprized long ago, and sent to the bottomless pit, and was not the same wrath due to you as well as to them? Their sins were not greater than yours; it may be not so great, nor so many: yet God hath had longer patience with you than with them. 3. If God had not exercised long patience towards you, where had you been? You had been cut off, not only from the enjoyment of this life, but also from all hope of a better. Had he snatched you away, while you were living and going on in sin, how deplorable had your condition been? 4. What would the damned in hell give to be under the divine patience as you are? They would reckon it an inestimable kindness, to have a year, yea, a day's respite, as a space to repent in; but they shall never have it. O then, admire God's patience toward you, and bless him for it.

Exhort.

(l) Exod. xxxiv. 9.

(m) Rev. vi. 10.

Exhort. 3. Beware of presuming on God's patience, by delaying your repentance and closing with Christ. Now you have a day of patience; and God is making rich offers of Christ and his grace to you on gracious terms, and patiently waits the success, and bears with your delays and denials. But, O, do not try his patience any longer. Do not take liberty still to go on in your sins, and to reject an offered Saviour, because you have to do with a patient God that bears with you. Do not adjourn or put off your obedience to this gospel any longer. Oh, sinners, will you weary out divine patience to the very last? God forbid. Improve the time of God's patience toward you.

I propose these considerations to press this.

1. Consider who it is that is thus patient toward you. It is the great God; he who is infinitely your superior, and more excellent than all the kings and princes of the earth. It is the mighty God, who can, with one blast of the breath of his nostrils, turn you and all the inhabitants of the earth into nothing. It is an offended God; he against whom you rebelled. Oh, shall not this prevail with you, that a God of infinite glory, an offended God, should wait for such worms of the earth, and bear with so many wrongs at your hand?

2. Consider how long he hath had patience with you. Three or four years space is, in Christ's reckoning, a long time (*n*). Such of you as have abused three years patience, may justly wonder that you are not cut down, and cast into the fire: yet God hath exercised his patience toward you for many more years. You have been *transgressors from the womb* (*o*); so that all your time hath been a time of patience. God hath borne with you from the womb till now. O how long hath he knocked at your door, and courted and wooed your hearts (*p*)? And how often hath his kindness been refused? And yet he is not gone, but still stands knocking. Oh, shall he not prevail at last? are you so hard-hearted, that you will not yield to him?

3. Consider how many sinners have been cut off during the time of God's patience toward you; some in the beginning of their days; others in their prime and strength. They were not greater sinners than you; it may be not so great; yet God hath sent them to hell, and you are spared as living monuments of his patience. You have abused and despised his grace, and slighted his love, more than they did: yet they are cut off from all hopes of mercy, and you are spared till this day. O, is not this a heart-melting consideration!

4. Con-

(*n*) Luke xiii. 7, 8. (*o*) Isa. xlvi. 8. (*p*) Rev. iii. 20.

4. Consider what a vast expence God is at upon you, during the time of his patience toward you. And, 1. He is at the expence of manifold mercies and blessings. His providence is daily at work about you, feeding, clothing, and preserving you. Now, all God's mercies are lost upon you, so long as your hearts are not gained to him by them. You spend upon the stock of mercy, and revel and wanton away God's blessings unprofitably. We read of *the riches of his goodness* (g). O what vast sums hath God spent upon thee, to keep thee so long out of hell? 2. He is at the expence of maintaining the lamp of ordinances with golden oil. Ministers are compared to olive trees, because being furnished with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, they drop this precious oil, to keep light and life in the candlestick of the church (r). God is at expence to furnish, fit, and send forth ministers, by whom he makes rich offers of grace and mercy, peace and pardon to poor sinners. This is the golden oil by which the lamp of ordinances is maintained and kept burning. Now, shall the treasures of grace run waste all this while in the offers of it? Shall Christ's ministers preach, and beseech, and woo in vain? Shall the blood of Christ run in the offers of it in vain? Shall God be at all this expence, while you are trifling with him? Oh, little do you consider that you are burning away the golden oil. Can you think not to be called to an account for this?

5. Consider how narrowly the Lord observes; and what an exact account he keeps, how long and how much you abuse his patience. Our blessed Lord expostulates with the Jews, O *faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you* (s)? He observes years and days: *These three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none* (t). He observes how many Sabbaths, sermons, communion-days, rich offers of grace, he allows you, and all in vain: And all will come into account and reckoning one day. If you must give an account for every idle word; much more for every idle Sabbath, sermon, and communion. Oh then, do not presume on God's patience any longer.

6. The time of God's patience toward you will come to an end. His *Spirit shall not always strive with man* (u). There is a time beyond which he will wait no longer on trifling and delaying sinners. There is a knock that will be his last. Jerusalem had a long day of patience, but it came to an end. Nations

(g) Rom. ii. 4.

(s) Matth. xviii. 17.

(r) See Zech. iv. 11, — 14. Rev. xi. 4.

(t) Luke xiii. 7.

(u) Gen. vi. 3.

tions have their day, and persons theirs (x): But the day of most persons is shorter than the day of nations.

7. As the day of God's patience will come to an end: So you know not how soon. The time of this life is the only time of divine patience; and that is most uncertain. You know not how few sands are yet to run in your glass. Oh, why will you *boast of to-morrow*, when you know not *what a day may bring forth* (y)? Again, your enjoyment of the gospel is uncertain. The gospel is compared to a candlestick; and that is a moveable thing: God may remove it at his pleasure, And your day of grace is uncertain. Yet a little time, and Christ may knock no more, and the Spirit strive with you no more; and then all hope of mercy is gone.

8. When the time of God's patience toward you is at an end, he will avenge the abuse of it. A time of patience abused will be followed with a day of trouble. Hence the Lord threatens, *I have long time holden my peace, I have been still, and refrained myself; now will I cry like a travailling woman, I will destroy, and devour at once* (z). You know not how soon the wrath of the Lamb may break forth against you in some destroying judgment; and you shall *perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little* (a). Or, if he forbear visible strokes of judgment; yet he may give loose reins to your lusts and corruptions, and suffer you to walk in your own counsels (b), that you may be the fitter fuel for his vengeance.

9. The longer he exercises his patience toward you, if you abuse it, your judgment will be the more severe. Christ is described with *feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace* (c). They are slow to move; but heavy to crush, and hot to burn. God's wrath loseth nothing by delays †. Your abuse of divine patience will greatly aggravate your torment in hell. O, how many sharp and bitter reflections will the consciences of such sinners have in hell, upon the precious seasons of grace they now enjoy? God will require interest hereafter for all his forbearance.

Well then, let me beseech and obtest you not to try God's patience any longer. Improve this time of his patience. Embrace the kind offers of his grace; and while he stands knocking at the door of your heart, make patent doors for him.

You

(x) Luke xix. 42. (y) Prov. xxvii. 1. (z) Isa. xlii. 14.

(a) Psal. ii. 12. (b) Psal. lxxxii. 12. (c) Rev. i. 15.

† *Lento gradu ad vindictam sui divina procedit ira: Tardita emque supplicii gravitate compensat.* Valer. Max. de Dionys. L. 1. C. 2.

You that are young, delay not your obedience to this gospel. O do not presume on the patience of God. Your day of patience may be at an end before old age come. What a great favour is it that God hath begun so soon, not only to make rich and gracious offers, but also to court and woo your hearts by the inward motions of his Spirit? But if you lose this season, you may never have the like again. If the strong man keep the house now, he is fair to keep it to the very last: For the longer Satan keeps possession, he is still building the more strong holds against Christ; and your lusts are still the more deeply rooted in your hearts. Now, God is knocking at the door of your heart; but if you refuse to open, he may be gone, and never knock again. And if your heart be too hard for the word now, when it is young, how difficult is your case like to be when you grow old? But why do I speak of your growing old? And why should you reckon on old age, seeing many younger than you have gone to the grave? How many candles have you seen put out before they were half burnt? Death may be at your heels, and you may be upon the very brink of eternity, and in a moment you may go down to the pit. Oh then, do not delay and put off any longer.

You that are old have sitten long under the invitations, calls, and offers of the gospel; and Oh, how often, and how long have you presumed on God's patience? Your blessed Saviour hath stood long at your door knocking, and hath waited long, and all in vain. Many a time hath he called, and you would not answer; and knocked, and you would not open. And if after so many denials and repulses as he hath had from you, he is still knocking and waiting patiently; this is one of the greatest wonders that ever you met with. O then, that you would open to him at last, and not presume upon his patience any longer. Is it not now high time that Christ had access and entrance into your hearts, after the devil hath had so long possession of them, and you have one foot in the grave already? Therefore, while there is any hope left, make patent the doors of your hearts, that the *King of glory* may come in (*d*). And do this with grief and shame, that you have been so long of doing it. Say with good Augustine, † Lord, I have been too long of loving thee; I have been too long of opening my heart to thee.

I say then, both to old and young, presume not any longer on the patience of God. O do not abuse it, by shifting and putting off your obedience to this gospel. While Christ stands knock-

(*d*) Psal. xxiv. 7. † *Nimis sero te amavi, Domine.*

knocking, let him not knock and wait in vain. As you love your souls, venture not upon one moment's delay. In order hereunto, I give these directions, 1. Meditate much and often upon God's patience toward you. You cannot, without an inexcusable slothfulness, miss the thoughts of it, seeing it is so manifest in all his ways toward you. Serious reflections upon it would be a mean to melt your heart for your unkindness to him. "Alas, that I have carried so toward such a meek and patient God; that he should make repeated offers of his grace, and wait so long, when he might justly cut me off, and cast me into hell without any more ado. Oh, do I thus requite the Lord? What a desperately wicked nature have I?" Thus, meditate much on the patience of God, and be serious in your reflections upon it. 2. Rest not in a bare patience, but study the end of it. Hell is full of those that once had a time of God's patience as well as you. Many have been reprieved that were never pardoned. The end why the Lord waits, is not to encourage you in your obstinacy, but to overcome your stubbornness. 3. Take heed of self-love. Many times sinners, out of an inordinate self-love, will not suffer themselves to think what a sad account their abuse of God's patience will come to. But what folly is it, to shun the thoughts of that severity, the feeling whereof you cannot shun, if the patience of God do not gain your hearts to him? 4. Study the vanity of all earthly refuges and reliefs against that terrible wrath that is reserved for obstinate and hardened sinners. There is a day called *The day of the wrath of the Lamb* (e): and, O, it will be a terrible day. What will you do when that day comes? Where will you find a place of refuge? All your carnal refuges and earthly comforts will then fail you. 5. Think deeply of the sin and danger of delaying and putting off. To delay ruins many; it gratifies Satan; it is direct disobedience to Christ's call: For the call of the gospel admits not of one moment's delay. *Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation* (f). God stands upon a present now with you. He will not always put up your frequent denials. 6. Be much in prayer. Pray earnestly, that God's patience may be effectual to work upon your hard hearts, and to obtain its blessed effect. It is divine grace alone that can make your thoughts of divine patience effectual to melt and gain your hearts.

SERMON

(e) Rev. vi. 17.

(f) 2 Cor. vi. 2.

S E R M O N XLVII.

Exhort. 4. **I**MPROVE the consideration of God's patience, and that to these ends and purposes.

1. To aggravate your sins. For this end, consider what I have said in the preceding exhortation.

2. To encourage and quicken you to repentance. He is a long-suffering God, in order to his being a pardoning God. Therefore, in the proclamation of his name before Moses, his *keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*, follow upon his *long-suffering* (a). He is long-suffering toward sinners, that he may shew mercy to, and forgive the sins of these who answer the design of his forbearance. As God's forbearance and long-suffering doth, in its own nature, *lead to repentance* (b); so the serious consideration thereof is a mean to engage us to it.

3. To commend God to you. O it is an endearing argument, and should render God amiable to you. His patience shews him to be of a sweet disposition. Sensible sinners are apt to entertain hard thoughts of God; and these hard thoughts are impediments that lie in the way of their coming to him by Christ. But see here how contrary such thoughts are to what he hath revealed himself to be. O what a meek and patient God have you to do with? He is of a most sweet nature. Sinners may promise to themselves a kind welcome, when they come to him in the way he hath appointed, by Jesus Christ. O that I cou'd commend him to you. Never entertain an ill thought of God any more.

4. Yet further, improve it to encourage you, when under the deep sense of sin, to come to God by Christ. In such a case, your heart is full of fear and trembling, lest it be too late, and lest God's bowels of pity and compassion be shut up. But, remember that he is a meek and patient God, and Christ is the meek Lamb of God. This is made use of by Christ as a great encouragement to poor burdened sinners to come to him. *Come unto me*, says he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart* (c). If he exercise so much forbearance toward obstinate and rebellious sinners that stand out against him; will he crush a poor relenting sinner, that is grieved for his rebellions, and would gladly have his peace made? And did he forbear thee when thou wast going on in sin with delight, and will he shew thee no favour now, when

(a) Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. (b) Rom. ii. 4. (c) Matth. xi. 28, 29.

when sin is become thy burden? Well then, be not afraid, but venture forward. Surely, you will not find him harsh and severe, as Satan represents him to be, but a tender-hearted and compassionate God.

5. To engage you to patience. This leads me to

Exhort. 5. Imitate the patience of God. And,

1. Be patient toward your fellow-christians. God exerciseth much and long patience toward sinners. He bears with many wrongs, and much contempt, and many affronts put upon his grace. O study to be like him. Exercise patience and long-suffering toward those that have wronged and injured you. Alas, how impatient are many professors of religion? They are very unlike God. He is slow to anger, even when he is much provoked: But they are soon angry, upon the least provocation, and give loose reins to their passion. Their spirits are like gun-powder, all in a flame with the least spark of a temptation: And their wrath and passion bewrays itself, in looks full of terror and threatening, in a tongue set on fire of hell, and in actions so uncomely and indecent, that it differs nothing from pure madness, save only in the duration of it. And how many are of malicious and revengeful spirits, upon any wrong or injury received, or what they apprehend to be an affront? Hence it is that so many horrid murders are committed. Men usurp the prerogative of God to whom vengeance belongeth. O, how unlike are such men to God? Who would be to the world, if God drew his sword upon every affront offered to him: But these men draw their swords for a trifle, and write their revenge in wounds and death. Homer saith of Agamemnon, that when he moderated his passions, he resembled the gods; but when he was in a fury, he was even like a tyger*. O Christians, study to be like God in patience. Be not short with those that have wronged you. Be not severe to them. Consider how many wrongs you have done to God, and that in comparison of them, all the wrongs done to you are but trifles; and where others have wronged you once, you have wronged God a thousand times. And when God hath borne with so many wrongs at your hand, shall you be transported with a desire of revenge upon one single injury? God forbid. If God were not slow to anger, not only you yourselves, but a whole sinful world had been destroyed long ere now. I shall only add, that patience being one of the divine perfections, it must needs also be an excel-

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* *Ridiculum est, odio nocentis innocentiam perdere.* Sen,

lent accomplishment of a human soul : And as it is an argument of great weakness, when men cannot possess their souls in patience, under the provocations they meet with ; so the patience of God being an effect of his infinite power over himself, your patience also under great provocations, will be an argument of great power over yourselves : And this is truly gallant and glorious : For *better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city (d)*.

2. Be patient towards God. Under afflicting dispensations of providence, watch against discontent, murmuring or repining against God. *In your patience possess ye your souls (e)*. God's patience is manifest in all his afflicting dispensations toward you. For, he doth not afflict willingly, but only when provoked by sin ; and though he afflict, yet it is not in all extremity, but in great measure ; so that considering your ill-deservings, you have, under the heaviest afflictions, more cause of thankfulness than of murmuring. His indulgences toward you have been more than his corrections. And though your afflictions be lengthened out, and of long continuance, yet bear it patiently. As he is not only patient, but long-suffering toward you ; so you should suffer with *a long patience*, as the word imports, James v. 7.

More particularly, it is the duty of gospel ministers, to imitate the patience of God. He exerciseth long patience toward obstinate sinners. He spreads out his hands to them all the day long (f). Though they slight and despise his grace, and reject his gracious offers ; yet he bears with them, and gives them renewed and repeated offers of Christ, and of grace and salvation through him. He doth not weary and give over ; and neither should we who are his ministers. Though sinners reject an offered Saviour, though they refuse to part with their sins, and to come to Christ, though they go on stubbornly in their transgressions : Yet we must not give over treating and dealing with them. We must wait patiently, and continue courting and wooing them to Christ. We must *preach the word, be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine (g)*. Want of success hath often proved a great discouragement to honest ministers. When they have been diligent in calling and inviting sinners to come to Christ, and in beseeching them to be reconciled to God ; when they have spent their time and strength in labouring thus from day to day, and yet can see no fruit of their labours : Then they are apt to faint, and to be discouraged, and to cry

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(d) Prov. xvi. 32. (e) Luke xxi. 19. (f) Isa. lxiii. 2.
(g) 2 Tim. iv. 2. (h) Jer. xx 9.

out with the prophet, *I will speak no more in his name (h)*. But, O, it would be of great advantage to us, to be often taking a view of the patience of God, that we might be engaged to imitate our glorious Pattern. Our blessed Lord and Master waits long for sinners; therefore it ill becomes us, his servants, to weary. Even a may be, or peradventure, we shall have success, is a great encouragement to wait patiently. So the apostle tells us, that *the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if peradventure God will give them repentance (i)*. It is very encouraging, that God, in measuring out the reward to honest ministers, doth not proportion it to their success, but to their diligence and faithfulness. *Though Israel be not gathered, yet diligent and faithful ministers shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord (k)*.

But let me in the last place recommend this duty to the elders of the church. And seeing I also have the honour to be an elder, I shall take my own share in this exhortation. My dear brethren, let us imitate the patience of God, by studying to exercise patience toward stubborn and obstinate sinners. This is both recommended to the elders of the church, and also commended in them. The apostle mentions this as one of the qualifications requisite in a bishop or overseer of the church, such as all elders of the church are in the sense of the Spirit of God, that they be *patient (l)*. And our Saviour commends it in the elders of the church of Ephesus: *I know thy works, says he, and thy labour, and thy patience, and thou hast borne, and hast patience: And in the elders of the church of Thyatira: I know thy patience (m)*. I shall insist a little on this head, because of the present occasion †. There is a threefold patience proper to the elders of the church, a bearing patience, a waiting patience, and a working patience.

First, A bearing patience. Let us bear patiently the trials and afflictions we may meet with in the way of our duty. Our zeal and impartiality in the exercise of discipline, our faithfulness and freedom in dealing with the consciences of sinners, may expose us to reproach, contempt and evil-speaking. But let us bear all patiently. Let us imitate our blessed Lord and Master, who *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself (n)*.
Let

(h) Jer. xx. 9.

(i) 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

(k) Isa. xlix. 5.

(l) 1 Tim. iii. 3. (m) Rev. ii. 2, 3, 19.

† The admission of divers persons to the office of ruling elders.

(n) Heb. xii. 3.

Let us patiently bear all the wrongs and indignities we may meet with at the hands of sinners. I would seriously recommend this, that we would not rigidly insist on what doth personally concern ourselves in any scandal: For, though it be our duty, by all proper means, to maintain and keep up the authority of Christ's ordinances; yet personal reflections should not be rigidly prosecuted; that so it may appear, that it is not a regard to our own esteem and authority, but zeal for our Lord and Master Christ, that actuates and influences us. Again,

When we have to do with stubborn and contumacious sinners: Though their stubbornness and obstinacy may be a great provocation; yet let us be patient, and not give way to irregular passions. It is true, such sinners are to be more sharply dealt with; yet we should patiently bear with their untractableness, and with delays and repulses at their hands, so as not to break out into wrath and passion. They that are ready to call for fire from heaven, know not what spirit they are of. It is true, the apostle commands us to *be angry*; but he adds, *and sin not* (a). We may and ought to be angry and displeased with scandalous and obstinate sinners: but when our anger boils up into wrath and passion, as this is most dishonourable to our blessed Lord and Master, so it exceedingly mars and obstructs the good fruit and effect of discipline. Passionate and furious prosecution seldom gaineth any person. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God* (p). Our Lord Jesus hath no need of our unruly passions. Even Michael the archangel *durst not bring a railing accusation* (q), no not against the devil himself, though in an excellent cause.

Secondly, A waiting patience. Let us not be hasty and precipitant in managing our Master's work, nor drive things furiously to a height, but be patient. This waiting patience hath place,

1. In delating scandalous persons. Here, both great prudence and great patience is required. True, if the scandal be public, or already become flagrant, or very atrocious in its nature, then it may be expedient and necessary to delate the offender immediately to the church judicatory, even though he give signs of a deep resentment of his sin in private: Because, in this case, regard is to be had, not only to the edification of the offender himself, but to the glory of God, and the edification of others. But if the scandal be private, or known only to a few, and not of an atrocious nature; then great patience should be exercised, and the offender is to be first rebuked and admonished

(a) Eph. iv. 26. (p) James i. 20. (q) Jude 2.

nished in private, by an elder, or some other offended brother; and if that do not prevail, then he is to take two or three more with him, and rebuke and admonish the offender before them, according to our Lord's direction (*r*). Thus, we must use great patience, in using private means to reclaim the offender, and in waiting the event and issue of them, before we bring the matter to public. If this method were observed, as it would cut off a great many needless processes that trouble church-judicatories; so it would be most convincing and edifying. To bring such private scandals immediately to public, is to waken scandals rather than to remove them, and is not consistent with love and charity. And suppose such a scandal be made known to a church-judicatory, before this method hath been taken; yet they may find it more for edification, that a private admonition be first given, rather than bring it immediately to public.

2. In inquiring into scandals, when they become flagrant, and trying such as are accused. As the church hath power, when there is a crying fame of any scandal, to search and inquire into it, to cite parties, to call and examine witnesses, and that upon oath: So there is here great patience to be exercised. We must not take things by guess, or upon hearsay, but try them (*s*). We must not judge rashly, or come hastily to a sentence, but wait patiently, till we have done every thing needful for compleating the trial, that so we may proceed upon convincing evidence against offenders.

3. In censuring these that are already convicted of scandal, and taking pains on them to bring them to repentance. All proper means are to be used for this end, by instructing and teaching them, exhorting and admonishing them, counselling and warning them, and exciting, quickening and encouraging them to repentance and faith in Christ. Though they seem very untractable and unteachable, yet great patience is to be used. We must not weary, but patiently wait, if God peradventure will give them repentance. Yea, though they be obstinate or contumacious, and do not so much as profess repentance; yet we must not rashly proceed to further and higher censure against them, till all due means be used to reclaim them, that so their obstinacy or contumacy may convincingly appear to all.

But when I say that church-officers should be patient in trying those that are accused, and in censuring those that are already convicted, I would not be so understood, as if I judged it the duty of church-officers, to protract and lengthen out processes,

(*r*) Matth. xviii.

(*s*) Rev. ii. 2.

cesses, and keep things long in dependence : for this doth exceedingly confuse and burden church officers, and mar the edification both of offenders, and of others : For, when scandals are fresh, they have usually a greater impression upon the minds of people ; but when they lie long over, this impression wears off, and so the good fruit and effect of discipline is obstructed. Therefore, though church-officers ought not to be hasty and precipitant ; yet their procedure ought to be with all convenient expedition from step to step, till they have brought the business to some period.

Thirdly, A working patience. Dear brethren, let us continue in our Master's work, and not faint under trials, or be discouraged by difficulties and opposition that we meet with. Neither the fear nor favour of men ; neither the frowns or threats of great men, nor the solicitations of friends, nor the reproaches that may be cast upon us, should make us desist ; but we should still go on, without interruption, in prosecuting our duty. For this the elders of Ephesus are commended. We must *have patience*, and *not faint* (t). We must not be deterred from our duty, nor weary of it, nor desert it, whatever trials or discouragements we meet with ; but by an invincible patience overcome all rubs in our way. Let us remember, that we are appointed to this work by the Lord Jesus, and it is his work, and not ours : Therefore no trials or discouragements whatsoever must make us give it over, or grow careless and indifferent in it ; but we must go on resolutely against all discouragements, and learn to digest difficulties with patience.

I shall conclude this head with a word of caution. Let us look carefully to it, that our patience do not ruin or prejudice our zeal. As we ought to be patient in managing our Master's work, so we should be zealous in it, *not bearing them that are evil* (u). There ought to be a holy impatience against sin, and a vigorous and impartial exercise of church discipline against all sorts of scandalous persons. Zeal and *patience* are joined together, and commended in the elders of Ephesus (x). Impatience against scandalous sins, and patience under difficulties and discouragements ; a not bearing them that are evil, and a patient bearing of trials ; these may very well stand together. There is a kind of zeal that grows impatient, when church-officers meet with discouragements and oppositions, and delays and untractableness in sinners ; and there is a kind of patience that wants zeal, a patience that can bear with evil men. Therefore, we who are church-officers should endeavour to have these

(t) Rev. ii. 3. (u) Rev. ii. 2. (x) Rev. ii. 2.

these two apparent in our practice; that our zeal may not wear out our patience, nor our patience prejudice our zeal. Patience would make our zeal to shine, and zeal would make our patience praise-worthy. Without patience our zeal will grow carnal, and without zeal our patience will grow lukewarm: and none of these can commend us to our blessed Lord and Master.

Use 4. For exhortation, to believers in Christ, the children of God.

1. Admire God's patience toward you, and bless and praise him for it. You owe your salvation to his patience. If he had not borne with you, and waited patiently many a day and year, O what had become of you? It was long ere some of you were persuaded to part with your sins, and to give yourselves unto the Lord. Now, what if he had cut you off when you were standing out against him? where had you been now? While unconverted, have you not sometimes been lying on a sick-bed, and at the gates of death in your own and other mens apprehension? And whence was your recovery but from divine patience? Many a time did you provoke him to put an end to his patience toward you. Thousands of sinners that never provoked him at that rate that you did, were cut off, and are now roaring in hell. O, admire his patience! It will be admired and praised in heaven. The patience of God, exercised toward the elect before conversion, will be no small part of their song there.

2. Lament and bewail your former obstinacy and baseness of nature, in standing out so long against God, when he waited on you with so much patience. O, what obstinate and wretched hearts have you, that kept the Lord of Glory standing and knocking so long at your door! This was such an affront offered to the Son of God, as can never enough be lamented.

3. Now, when you have through grace given yourselves to the Lord, O do not abuse his patience any more. Let it suffice that you have so often done so formerly. The spouse, when Christ came knocking, put him off with lazy excuses (y). Sometimes Christ comes knocking by the motions of his Spirit, calling and exciting you to duty, and inviting you to entertain communion with him: O do not keep him at the door, by your laziness and sluggishness. When he calls you to such a sweet exercise as communion with him, and knocks again and again, what pity is it that he should be refused? As this would be a great grief to his heart, so it will be much to your loss.

The

(y) Cant. v. 2, 3.

The spouse found it so (z). Christ will be gone, and you may seek him much and long ere you find him again.

4. Learn to wait patiently for God under all the seeming denials, repulses, and discouragements you meet with at his hand. Sometimes you seek him, but cannot find him, to your sense; you call, but he gives you no answer; you knock, but there is no opening. He hides his face, and withdraws his presence; and though you seek him, and long for him, yet he comes not; and your patience is soon worn out. O, how apt are you to weary and give over. But in these and the like cases, learn to wait patiently. Consider, 1. How long he waited on you: It may be thirty, or forty, or fifty years? O how long and how often did you despise his grace, and reject his kind offers, and he waited patiently all the while. If God had been as quick with you, as you are with him, O what had become of you? 2. He is still waiting the best and fittest time for manifesting himself. *He waits that he may be gracious to you (a)* You think that you wait for God; but it is he that waits for you. 3. It is worth your while to wait for him. The first sight of his blessed face, though it were not till you see him in glory, will blot out the remembrance of all your sorrows under his absence.

(z) Cant. v. 3, &c.

(a) Isa. xxx. 18.

DISCOURSE XL.

Of the Mercy of God.

SERMON XLVIII.

Psal lxii. 12. *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.*

I Considered the context, and explained the verse immediately preceding this, when I discoursed of the power of God. In the words now read, the psalmist lays down another ground of faith and confidence in God, to wit, *his mercy*. That we may be engaged to trust in God alone, it is necessary that we believe and consider his mercy as well as his power. The power of God alone, is not a sufficient foundation for trust. Something more is necessary to invite us to a dependence on him, than his bare power and ability to help us. There must be al-
so

so a firm perswasion of the promptitude and readines of his will to do what he is able: And this we have in the other attribute of his mercy. Though we are undeserving and ill-deserving creatures, yet he is a merciful God, not only able, but ready to help and succour poor miserable creatures, notwithstanding of their sins. This answers all objections from our sinfulness and unworthiness.

While the psalmist is turning his thoughts to the mercy of God, in conjunction with his power, his soul is by these two, as by two wings, carried up to God; so that he turns his speech to God himself, to whom he desired to give the glory of both. *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy. Unto THEE: unto thee alone, and unto none else.* The tenderest mercy amongst the creatures is none at all, being compared with the divine mercy. It *BELONGETH unto thee*, as thy prerogative and peculiar excellency. Mercy is a peculiar jewel of his crown. Or, *Thine, O Lord, is mercy.* Nothing amongst the creatures deserves the name of mercy but his own. Nothing is worthy to be so called, but what is proper and peculiar to God. Or, *With thee is mercy* (a); as it is expressed elsewhere. It is *with him*; that is, it is inseparable from his nature. He is merciful in a way peculiar to himself; *the Father of mercies* (b).

The doctrine that ariseth from these words is this:

Matchless and incomparable mercy is one of God's glorious excellencies and perfections.

✓ Mercy is the great wonder of the divine nature. Every thing in God is wonderful, but especially his pardoning mercy. It is not so great a wonder that he made the heaven and the earth, and rules the raging sea, and hangs the earth upon nothing; because he is infinite in power: But that he should be merciful to sinners, and infinitely merciful, when he is infinitely just; this is the great wonder.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall shew,

1. *That God is merciful; or, that mercy is one of the divine perfections.*
2. *What mercy is in God; or, what is the nature of this divine perfection.*
3. *That God is matchless and incomparable in his mercy.*
4. *Wherein the infinite and incomparable mercy of God is manifested.*
5. *I shall apply the whole.*

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(a) Psal. cxxx. 4, 7.

(b) 2 Cor. i. 3.

First, I shall prove that God is merciful; or, that mercy is one of the divine perfections. This is so plain and evident from the holy scriptures, that I need not insist upon it. Much is spoken in scripture of the mercy of God. Yea, it is the great design of the scripture to represent God as merciful. This is the first letter of his glorious name, as he himself proclaimed it before Moses: *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious* (c). And he must needs be so: For, 1. Mercy is a great excellency and perfection in men, among whom such as are of more noble and generous spirits are most merciful: Therefore it must be in God in an eminent and transcendent manner. For whatever perfections are to be found in the creatures, must needs be eminently in an infinitely perfect Being: And how could he communicate mercy to his creatures, if it were not eminently and infinitely in himself? 2. All creatures are monuments or witnesses of the mercy of God, but men especially, and among them the truly godly. What are all their experiences but a constant course of mercy? If we do but consider what an abundance of blessings we receive for our relief in our various miseries, we must needs be confirmed in this truth by our own senses. All is to shew that we have to do with a most merciful God. 3. The universal experience of the world possesseth all mens minds with this apprehension, that he is a merciful God.

But how can God be most merciful, when he is most just? I answer, justice and mercy, as they are in God, are infinite and equal; but in respect of their exercise there is a difference: † For mercy findeth no merit in the creature; but justice is not exercised but when it is deserved. Justice seeks a fit object, mercy only a fit occasion: Justice looks to what is deserved, mercy to what is wanted and needed. Again, divine justice and mercy are not opposite to one another: For God never shews mercy contrary to justice, nor executes justice contrary to mercy. His mercy is never exercised unjustly, nor his justice unmercifully. He is righteous without being cruel, and and merciful without being unjust. His mercy is righteous, and his justice merciful. He is infinitely just in executing vengeance on these that live and go on in sin, and infinitely merciful in pardoning and saving penitent believing sinners. And his mercy is exercised, without prejudice to his justice, because justice hath a full satisfaction in the sufferings of Christ the Surety: So that there is justice in punishing the sin, and mercy in relieving the sinner. The sin is punished by justice in the

(c) Exod. xxxiv. 3.

† *Deus cui proprium est misereri ex se misere randi sumit materiam: Quod autem, condemnat eum cogimus.* Bern. in Cant. Serm. 7.

Surety, and pardoned by mercy in the sinner: So that he is just without impairing the honour of his mercy, and merciful without invading the rights of justice.

Secondly, I proceed to shew what the mercy of God is; or, what is the nature of this divine perfection.

Mercy in man is, * *Such a compassion of heart for the misery of another, as inclines us to relieve him in his misery.* So that the proper object of mercy is misery, and that whether the misery be incumbent or imminent. A merciful man relieves a creature in misery, and shelters him from misery. † Mercy hath its name from misery. And in the Greek, the word ‡ that signifies miserable, is derived from another word § which signifies mercy. Mercy hath two things in it: 1. A pity and compassion of heart for the misery of another. There is sympathy, fellow-feeling or compassion in it; because it makes the heart a partaker of the misery of him that is in distress. Hence, according to some, it is called *misericordia*, because it translates the misery of one distressed person into the heart of another. Hence we read of *bowels of compassion* (d); because a man's bowels are moved by it: He is affected as if the bowels of him that is in misery were in his body. 2. A promptitude and forwardness to relieve and succour the miserable. The *bowels of the merciful are not shut up* (e). There is a propensity to relieve, whether we have power to effect that relief or not.

From what is said, we may be helped to some becoming conception of the divine mercy. Mercy in God is not a passion or quality, as it is in men, but the divine essence itself considered as ready to relieve the miserable. Nor is it attributed to God as it denotes grief for the misery of another. || In God there is no trouble or grief of mind, no commotion or perturbation, no compassion or fellow-feeling, properly. His most simple and perfect nature is incapable of such things. But mercy is attributed to God, as it signifies a prompt and ready will to relieve the miserable. Here then let us consider, 1. The object of it. 2. The nature of it.

1. The object of divine mercy is a creature in misery. 1. I say, a creature: for this is an attribute that relates to the creature

* *Misericordia est alienæ miseriæ in nostro corde compassio, quæ utique si possumus subvenire compellimur.* Aug. de C. D. L. 9. C. 5.

† *Misericordia* ‡ Ἐλεῖν § Ἐλεος.

(d) Co'. iii. 12. and elsewhere. (e) 1 John iii. 17.

|| *Cum tu respicis nos miseros, nos sentimus miserationis effectum, tu non sentis miserationis affectum.* Anselm protol. C. 8.

ture only. God knows himself, and loves himself; but is not merciful to himself. 2. It respects a creature in misery. Mercy is a shewing favour to a miserable person. The goodness of God, as it discovers itself to the creature, hath these various denominations or branches, *Love, Bounty, Grace, and Mercy*. Love differs from the other three in this. The love of God first falls upon himself; he first loves himself, and then the creature: But the bounty, mercy, and grace of God, respect the creature only; he cannot be bountiful, or gracious, or merciful to himself. There is also a difference between divine bounty, grace, and mercy, with respect to their objects. Bounty respects the creature as a creature. Thus, he gives being to things, bare life to some, sense to others, reason and grace to men and angels. Grace respects the creature as unworthy, and unable to make any recompence to God, or to merit any thing at his hand: But mercy respects the creature as miserable. Again, bounty respects all the creatures; grace and mercy the rational creatures, but with this difference: Grace is more general, and respects both angels and men; whatever good they enjoy, they have it of free grace; for *who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompenced to him again (f)*: But mercy is a particular kind of grace exercised toward the miserable. God doth good to the angels that never sinned, out of grace; but to fallen man, not only out of grace, but out of mercy, because he was once miserable. So that fallen man is the proper object of mercy, as having plunged himself by sin into all misery. The angels that sinned are bound over to justice, and secluded from mercy: *God cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment (g)*. Yet that misery which is the object of mercy, is not always present and seen, which is cured by mercy; but sometimes future and foreseen, which is prevented by mercy: And preventing mercies are greater and more in number than the other, though not so sensible.

✓ 1. The nature of divine mercy, lies in the promptitude and readiness of the divine will to succour and relieve the miserable. So that when God is called *merciful*, or *of great mercy*, the plain meaning is, he is of a most forward nature to help and relieve us in our miseries. This is the essential part of mercy. Sympathy with the distressed, and a fellow-feeling of their miseries, is but accidental to mercy, in regard that our natures are so subject to passions, that we cannot look on the miseries of those whom we love without sympathy and compassion.

(f) Rom. xi. 35. (g) 2 Pet. ii. 4.

passion. But there being no passion in God, therefore there can be no compassion, properly. Yet there is in God something analogous to compassion in us, something like pity; to wit, his taking such notice of our misery, that he is willing from the heart to help and relieve us. And in this sense it is that *pity* (*h*), *compassion* (*i*), *moving of the bowels* (*k*), and *grief for the afflicted* (*l*), are in scripture ascribed unto God; because there is such a promptness and readiness in his nature to relieve the miserable, as if he were thus affected with their misery, or as there is in men when they are deeply affected with the miseries of others. There is such a readiness to relieve, as if he had the like working of bowels that men have. Hence the most tender compassions in any are applied to God, as those of a *father* and *mother* (*m*). Such expressions may also be designed to shew what God of old intended to do, and what he doth and will do now, in the human nature which he hath assumed. So, it is said of Christ, that he can be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities* (*n*). He was moved with *compassion* at mens bodily diseases, and at their spiritual distresses (*o*). And Christ being the image of the invisible God, the tender mercy of the divine nature was, in a sort, made visible to us in him.

But for our further help in our conceptions of the mercy of God, I lay down these propositions.

Propos. 1. Divine mercy is the original spring and fountain-cause of all our blessings. It is so of our temporal blessings. Hence the psalmist tells us, that God *being full of compassion, forgave his peoples' iniquity, and destroyed them not* (*p*). And also of our spiritual blessings. It is *of his mercy* that he *begets* his people *into a lively hope*; of *his mercy* he *saves* them; and of *his mercy* he *quickens* them (*q*). All are fruits of divine mercy. It is his mercy that sets all his other attributes a-work for our good; his wisdom to contrive, and his power to effect, what may be for our relief and happiness, and his justice to avenge our quarrel: So that all his other attributes are serviceable to his mercy. We are such ill-deserving creatures, that we could expect no good from God, were it not for his infinite mercy. Hence the saints do always plead mercy; this is the great argument: *Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; for we are brought*

(*h*) Isa. lxiii. 9. James v. 11. (*i*) Psal. lxxxvi 15. cxlv. 8. 2 Kings xiii. 23. (*k*) Isa. lxiii. 15. Jer. xxxi. 20. (*l*) Judges x. 16. (*m*) Psal. ciii 13. Isa. xlix. 15. (*n*) Heb. iv. 15. (*o*) Matth. xv. 32. and ix. 36. (*p*) Psal. lxxviii. 38. (*q*) 1 Pet. i 3. Tit iii. 5. Eph. ii. 4.

brought very low (r). It is mercy that finds out means for the help and relief of his people in their distresses. Hence the psalmist expects his salvation from divine mercy: *He shall send from heaven, says he, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth (s).* Misery offers the occasion, but the cause of all is mercy. But what moves him to shew mercy? Nothing in the creature; but because he *will* have mercy: we can go no higher. *He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy (t).* Hence it is that all these blessings, temporal and spiritual, which God bestows on us, are called *mercies (u)*. And when God, by bestowing such blessings, succours and relieves us of our miseries, then he said to *have* or *shew* mercy (x), and to be *merciful* to us (y); and they that receive blessings are said to *obtain* mercy (z).

Propof. 2. We must distinguish between mercy as it is in God and the exercise of his mercy. And, 1. The exercise of it is free. As it is in God it is essential to and inseparable from his nature: we cannot conceive him God, unless we conceive him merciful. He is necessarily merciful, as well as necessarily just. But the exercise of his mercy is free and arbitrary, and regulated by his will and wisdom. It is exercised according to his own will and pleasure, to some more, and to others less, as his wisdom judgeth fit. *He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy (a).* In this it differs from justice, the exercise whereof is necessary. The reason is, because justice looks to what is due and deserved, but mercy to what is wanted and needed. Again, the exercise of his mercy is regulated, not only by his will but by his wisdom, in such a way, and upon such terms, as is consistent with his infinite justice and holiness, and the regard he must have for the authority of his law and the honour of his government. 2. As divine mercy is exercised freely, so also with delight. God delights in the manifestation of all his attributes, but chiefly in the exercise of his mercy. So it is said, *he delighteth in mercy (a).* Acts of vengeance are not so pleasing to him as acts of mercy. Acts of mercy flow from him freely, of his own accord: But acts of vengeance only when he is provoked; *for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men (b).* Judgment is his
strange

(r) Psal. lxxix. 8. (s) Psal. lvii. 3. (t) Rom. ix. 18. (u) Gen. xxxii. 10. Rom. xii. 1. (x) Rom. ix. 18. Isa. lv. 7. (y) Gen. xix. 16. (z) 1 Tim. i. 13. (a) Rom. ix. 18.
 (a) Micah vii. 18. (b) Lam. iii. 33.

strange work, and his strange act. Hence he is called *the Father of mercies* (c). The exercise of his mercy is so pleasant to him, that when it conflicts with justice in the behalf of sinners, and gets the upperhand, he rejoiceth in the victory: *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment* (d). He takes such delight in it, that he is upbraided with it, even by a godly prophet, Jonah, as if he were too fond of mercy, and loved it over-much: — *I pray thee, O Lord, says he, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarsbith: For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful* (e). Yea, God accounts it his glory to shew mercy. Hence he says, *It shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall bear all the good that I do unto them* (f). His mercy is his glory. When Moses desired to see the glory of God, the Lord proclaimed, *The Lord God merciful and gracious* (g).

Propos. 3. We must distinguish between mercy, as it a perfection of the divine nature, and the acts and effects of his mercy as they are terminated on the creature. The effects are these blessings, whereby, in his mercy and compassion, he relieves us in our miseries. These are many and various; but mercy, as it is in him, is one and unchangeable. This is infinite; these are of a finite nature, and are more or less, as in his wisdom he seeth meet.

S E R M O N XLIX.

Third, **I** Come, in the next place, to shew that God is matchless and incomparable in his mercy. Mercy belongs to him: It is his prerogative; in a sort peculiar to him alone: So that all the creatures are void of mercy, if compared with God: Their mercy is no mercy in comparison. The most merciful fall infinitely short of him. All the tender compassions of fathers and mothers put together, would be but a dark shadow and resemblance of the mercy of God.

Particularly, the mercy of God is, 1. Original mercy; the origin and fountain-cause of all that mercy and mercifulness that is one creature toward another. Therefore he is called *the Father of mercies* (a). The mercies of all parents toward their children, the mercies of all Christians, of every tender-hearted person toward another, are but drops from that fountain

(c) Isa. xxviii. 21. 2 Cor. i. 3. (d) James ii. 13. (e) Jonah iv. 2. (f) Jer. xxxiii. 9. (g) Exod xxxiv. 6.
(a) 2 Cor. i. 3.

tain and ocean of mercy that is in God. 2. It is communicative mercy; communicative of itself. The divine mercy is *over all his works*; and *the earth is full of it* (b). What hath God been doing these several thousands of years, but multiplying his blessings on the miserable. 3. It is tender mercy. So it is often called (c). It is compared to the mercy of parents toward their children (d), which is usually very tender. And we read of *God's bowels* (e). He hath bowels of mercy toward his people. The tenderness of his mercy appears in his readiness to hear and help his people, when they cry to him in their distress: According to that promise, *It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and whiles they are yet speaking, I will hear* (f). When the prodigal son was coming, *the father had compassion, and ran to meet him* (g). When Ephraim repented and bemoaned himself, with what tender compassion doth the Lord speak of him (h)? O the tenderness of divine mercy! How tenderly is he affected, if I may say so, with his peoples' miseries! How tender of their infirmities and weaknesses! 4. It is free mercy. Though his mercy be natural to him, so that he could not be God, if he were not merciful: Yet the exercise thereof is free, without any desert on our part. God is not tied to one more than to another. He hath mercy on whom he will, on the Gentile as well as the Jew, on the poor as well as the rich, on the bond as well as the free. We cannot oblige him to acts of mercy by any thing we can do. The apostle makes the challenge, *Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again* (i)? 5. It is great mercy. The psalmist owns this: *Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord* (k). It is full and abundant. Therefore God is said to be *plenteous in mercy* (l), and *rich in mercy* (m); and it is called *abundant mercy* (n). He hath *a multitude of mercies* (o), and *manifold mercies* (p), and *mercies for thousands* (q). There is a fulness of mercy in God that is inexhaustible; riches and treasures of mercy that we cannot count the value of; a multitude of mercies, greater than can be expressed or conceived. Consider how many there are to whom God is pleased to shew mercy; none ever lived in the world but tasted of his mercy; and all the elect, in all ages,

(b) Psal. cxlv. 9. and cxix. 64. (c) Psal. li. 1. and lxxix. 8. and cxix. 156. and elsewhere. (d) Psal. ciii. 13. Isa. xlix. 15. (e) Jer. xxxi. 20. (f) Isa. lxv. 24. (g) Luke xv. 20. (h) Jer. xxxi. 18, 19, 20. (i) Rom. xi. 35. (k) Psal. cxix. 156. (l) Psal. lxxxvi. 5, 15. (m) Eph. ii. 4. (n) 1 Pet. i. 3. (o) Psal. li. 1. (p) Neh. ix. 19. (q) Exod. xxxiv. 7.

ages, have been objects of his special mercy. Consider how many benefits he hath bestowed on every one: There are many repeated acts of mercy, and mercies of divers kinds: Hence the psalmist cries out, *Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered (r)*. Innumerable are the supplies, provisions, deliverances, comforts, supports, received by one man: What then are these received by a whole world? And all these are mercies. 6. It is effectual mercy. Many times man's mercy goes no further than compassion, and a willingness and readiness to help and relieve, without any ability to effect it: But God hath infinite power to render his mercy effectual for our relief, in our deepest misery and distress. There is no strait so great, no distress so deep, no danger so imminent, in which his merciful hand cannot help. He is able to render his mercy effectual, for removing any evil present, and averting any evil that is imminent. 7. It is infinite mercy. It is *great above the heavens (s)*: That is, it is above all apprehension. We cannot possibly take up the greatness of God's mercy. It is far above out of our reach. As we cannot measure the vast circumference of the highest heavens; so, far less can we measure the greatness of God's mercy; for it is *great above the heavens*: Or, as some render the particle, *unto the heavens*; and so it agrees best with what follows, *and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds*. So the meaning is, *thy mercy reacheth unto the heavens*; that is, it is infinite and incomprehensible. It is boundless and unmeasurable. The greatest sinner is hereby encouraged to repentance: *Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (t)*. We cannot take the height, nor sound the depth of his mercy. There is an ocean of mercy in God to swallow up mountains of guilt. Hence is that expression, *Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (u)*. His mercy is unsearchable; a depth that none can fathom. He is merciful above all measure, beyond all degrees, in all perfection. 8. It is durable, yea, eternal mercy. *His compassions fail not (x)*. And *his mercy endureth for ever (y)*. His mercy is not

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E e e

spent

(r) Psal. xl. 5. (s) Psal. cxviii. 4. (t) Isa. lv. 7, 8, 9. (u) Mic. vii. 19. (x) Lam. iii. 22. (y) Psal. cxviii. 1. &c. and cxxxviii. 1. &c.

spent or diminished by all that he hath communicated to the creatures. We waste by giving; but this Fountain is as full as ever. And his mercy toward his own reacheth from the one end of eternity to the other: *The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him* (z). As it was exercised from everlasting, in gracious purposes; so it will be exercised to everlasting, in gracious performances.

Fourthly, I go on to shew wherein the infinite and incomparable mercy of God is manifested.

It is manifest in his works. It is *over all his works*, and *the earth is full of it* (a). The whole world is a volume written within and without with characters of mercy. For clearing this, consider that the mercy of God is twofold, general and special.

1. General mercy; whereby God sustains and relieves any creature in misery. Thus, he is merciful even to the beasts and fowls. This the psalmist declares: *The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. He giveth the beast his food; and to the young ravens which cry* (b). This general mercy is exercised toward good and bad men, the just and unjust. *He maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust* (c). And the apostle takes notice, that *he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness* (d). He gives food, raiment, health, wealth, friends, liberty, outward and temporal preservation and deliverance, even to the worst of men. All these are witnesses that he is a merciful God.

2. Special mercy; whereby he bestows special and saving blessings on the elect. The elect are *vessels of mercy* (e). Divine mercy fills them with the choicest blessings. This special mercy of God is distinguished according to the several miseries in which he succours and relieves his people. Particularly, it is seen, 1. In bestowing the first grace on the elect. He is merciful to them, when he pities them lying polluted in their own blood, renews them by his grace, quickens them to a new life, and brings them home to himself (f). Thus he exerciseth his mercy without a regard had to any qualification in us, and when we do not so much as desire mercy. 2. In all the

(z) Psal. ciii. 17.

(a) Psal. cxlv. 9. and cxix. 64. (b) Psal. cxlv. 15, 16. and cxlvii. 9. (c) Matth. v. 45. (d) Aet xiv. 17. (e) Rom. ix. 23. (f) See 1 Tim. i. 13. 1 Pet. i. 3. Eph. ii. 4.

the subsequent grace and blessings they stand in need of. And with respect to these there are certain qualifications required in the objects of mercy. They must fear God: For *the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him* (g). They must trust in him; for *he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about* (h). They must call on him: For *he is plentiful in mercy unto all them that call upon him* (i). They must love him and keep his commands: For *he sheweth mercy unto thousands of them that love him, and keep his commandments* (k). They must walk according to the rule of the word, or suitably to these principles of grace that are wrought in them in their regeneration: *As many as walk according to this rule, says the apostle, peace be on them, and mercy* (l). They must be merciful: *Blessed are the merciful, says our Lord, for they shall obtain mercy* (m). Particularly, God is merciful to them, in pardoning all their iniquities, in healing all their spiritual diseases, in accepting their persons and duties, in supplying their spiritual wants, in hearing and answering their prayers, in directing them in their doubts and difficulties, in supporting them under their heavy pressures, in strengthening and delivering them in temptations, in comforting them in all their tribulations, &c. O who can reckon up the various kinds of God's mercy toward his people! At last, there is *the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life* (n). This is the crowning mercy, when believers shall be delivered from impure hearts and imperfect graces, and receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. But the great mercy of mercies is Christ himself. He is the peerless, invaluable, and matchless mercy of God. Hence he is called *the mercy promised to the fathers* (o). Christ is a mercy that suits all our wants and needs: For *it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell* (p). We need no more but Christ to relieve us in all our miseries, and to make us completely happy in time and eternity. Here is admirable and astonishing mercy. Here the mercy of God is gone to the uttermost. There cannot be a greater expression of divine mercy than God's giving Christ for and to poor miserable sinners. O infinite and incomprehensible mercy!

Fifthly, I proceed to the application.

Use 1. For reproof. To them that wrong and abuse the mercy of God. O how dreadful is this! When you have made mercy your enemy, what will justice be? Particularly, the mercy of

(g) Psal. ciii. 17. (h) Psal. xxxii. 10. (i) Psal. lxxxvi. 5.
 (k) Exod. xx 6 (l) Gal. vi. 16 (m) Matth. v. 7. (n) Jude
 21. (o) Luke i. 72. (p) Col. i. 19.

of God is wronged and abused, 1. By sinning against mercy. Sins against mercy are sins of a deep aggravation, double-dyed. What an aggravated crime is it, to spurn against God's tender bowels? This will leave impenitent sinners without excuse; Yea, the recollecting of abused mercy will be the most piercing ingredient in their torment in hell fire. 2. By presuming to sin in confidence of mercy. When sinners take liberty to sin, and to go on in sin, because God is merciful; "I have to do with a merciful God, therefore I may take a little liberty; I hope to repent afterward, and then I shall surely get mercy." This is to take poison, in hopes of an antidote, which may be far from hand. God may deny you grace to repent afterward; And though you cry for mercy, you may cry and not be heard. God is just as well as merciful; and he will *not be merciful to any wicked transgressors (q)*. As he is infinitely merciful to pardon penitent and believing sinners, so he is infinitely just to take vengeance on the impenitent: For God *shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses (r)*. 3. By sinning in contempt of mercy. Like these to whom the prophet speaks: *Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: But thou saidst, There is no hope: No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go (s)*. "I will take my course, come of me what will; I will take my pleasures, though I should never get mercy." This is interpretatively the language of many wicked sinners. Such are desperate rebels against God. 4. By slighting and rejecting the offers of mercy. As the Pharisees, who *rejected the counsel of God against themselves (t)*. In the gospel God offers mercy to you on gracious terms. Now, when you will not hearken to his voice, but refuse your consent to the gracious terms he proposeth; this is to reject offered mercy, as if it were not worth the having. 5. By despairing of mercy. "Oh," says the sinner, "God will never have mercy on the like of me; I have sinned so and so; my sins are great, and many, and so and so aggravated; none are like me in sinning: Therefore it is impossible that I can obtain mercy!" This is to run cross to the whole strain of the gospel: And hereby you gratify the devil exceedingly: For he suggests such unbelieving thoughts, of purpose to sink your soul under discouragement: And hereby you wrong the mercy of God, and darken the glory of it, by straitening it in your own thoughts.

Use

(q) Psal. lix. 5. (r) Psal. lxxviii. 21. (s) Jer. ii. 25. (t) Luke vii. 30.

Use 2. For comfort to believers in Christ. O how comfortable is it, that your covenanted God is a God of infinite mercy! How vile and unworthy soever you be in yourselves, yet what may you not expect from infinite mercy? And having this merciful God for your God, you need not be dismayed at any misery. All his thoughts toward you are *thoughts of mercy* (u). All his designs are projects of mercy. *All his ways toward you are mercy* (x). If he smile, it is mercy; if he smite, it is mercy. And how comfortable is it, that in all your sorrows, sufferings, and weaknesses, God pities you (y)! It is some relief, in our distresses, to be pitied even by men; how much more, to be objects of the divine compassion? It cannot but yield great refreshment unto believers in Christ, that in all their hardships, they have the compassionate and merciful God present with them, who hath all power in his hand, to render his compassion effectual for their relief. Under your heaviest afflictions you are in the hands of a merciful Father, who will lay no more on than he gives strength to bear. Such is his mercy and compassion, that he will not consume you in the furnace, but only try you, and will bring all your trials to a blessed and happy issue. The wounds of mercy are better than the embraces of anger.

Use 3. For exhortation. In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Labour to get and entertain large thoughts of the mercy of God. When conscience is awakened, and men see the black and horrid nature of sin, they are apt to bound and limit the mercy of God in their thoughts. Against this that expression is designed as an antidote, *He will have mercy upon him, and he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, &c* (z). Sinners never err in having too large thoughts of God's mercy, but in seeking and hoping for mercy out of God's way. His mercy is infinite and incomprehensible. Meditate deeply and frequently upon it. Think of the large expressions of the divine mercy in the holy scriptures; and reflect seriously on the ample discoveries God hath given of his mercy in all his works, and more especially in his dealings with his own people. O, do not think of divine mercy with extenuating and diminishing thoughts; but cherish good thoughts of God, and of the largeness and fulness of his mercy, that so you may admire and adore it, and praise him for it. Think of it so as becomes the infiniteness of his nature.

Large

(u) Jer. xxix. 11.
(z) Isa. lv. 7, 8, 9.

(x) Psal. xxv. 10.

(y) Isa. lxiii. 9.

Large thoughts of divine mercy will answer all your doubts and fears, when you are under the deep sense of your own vileness and unworthiness.

Exhort. 2. Make it your business to get a saving interest in God as your God. When you have an interest in him, then you have an interest in his mercy. When God is yours, then his mercy is yours, to pardon all your iniquities, to supply all your wants, to direct you in all your doubts, and to do all things for you. The mercy of God is the original and fountain-cause of all our comforts. When you have an interest in his mercy, then all his other attributes will be for your good; for, as I already observed, they are all serviceable to mercy.

S E R M O N L.

Exhort. 3. **B**E earnest to obtain mercy, to partake and share of God's special mercy.

To excite and engage you to this, I propose these considerations.

Consid. 1. Your apprehensions of divine mercy will then only be lively and powerful, when you share of the saving fruits and effects of it. You have heard that there are admirable expressions of the mercy of God in his dealings with his own people: but the hearsay will do you little good without experience. You can never have such admiring thoughts of the mercy of God, as when you have felt the sweetness of it in yourselves. And you cannot talk of it to others, with that life, sense, and affection, as when you have experience of it in your own souls. A report from experience is lively and powerful.

Consid. 2. God is most willing and ready to shew mercy even to the vilest sinners. The most unworthy are not excluded from mercy. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (a).* As if he had said, Let any wicked and unrighteous man do so, and he shall certainly obtain mercy. This is the great argument used to press repentance: *Turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful. The Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return to him (b).* Hear his name as he himself proclaimed it before Moses: *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and*
gracious,

(a) Isa. lv. 7.

(b) Joel ii. 13. 2 Chron. xxx. 9.

gracious, &c (c). His mercies are great mercies, tender mercies, everlasting mercies, mercies beyond all imagination. He hath a multitude of tender mercies (d). He hath an ocean of mercy: It is boundless and unmeasurable.

Consid. 3. The terms on which God offers mercy are very gracious. It is assured to penitent believing sinners, such as turn to God through Christ: for to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins (e). If sinners turn to the Lord, he will have mercy upon them: And whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy (f). So that, if you will renounce all iniquity, and close with Christ, and turn to God through him, then you shall obtain mercy: And no mercy on any other terms. If you will not come to Christ; if you hold fast your iniquities, and sleep securely in sin, making a carnal pillow of the mercy of God; then you cannot expect mercy: God will not be merciful to any wicked transgressors; and he that believeth not shall be damned, and the wrath of God abideth on him (g). But if you believe on Christ, and turn to God, resigning yourselves to him through Christ, then you shall surely obtain mercy. There are in the word of God the most solemn declarations to this purpose. Yea, God hath ratified and confirmed his word by his solemn oath, and swears that he hath no pleasure in your death and ruin: *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel (h)?* Consider, 1. God requires nothing unreasonable. Is it not highly reasonable, that you should return to him who is your rightful Lord and Sovereign, grieving for the many wrongs you have done to him, and resolving to do so no more? Or, can there be any turning to an offended God, but through Christ the blessed Mediator? Surely God hath best right to you; none can lay such claim to you as he can do; and there is no coming to God but by Christ (i). 2. He requires nothing impossible. Indeed it is impossible for you to make satisfaction to justice for your own sins; but God is content to shew you mercy, and to receive you into favour, on the account of a satisfaction made by another, even the Lord Jesus Christ; and there is nothing required of you but what is sweet and easy, considered in its own nature. True, it

(c) Exod. xxxiv. 6. (d) Psal. li. 1. (e) Acts x. 43. (f) Isa. lv. 7. Prov. xxviii. 13. (g) Psal. lix. 5. Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36. (h) Ezek. xxxiii. 11. (i) John xiv. 6.

it is impossible for you to believe in Christ, or to turn to God, of yourselves; yet it is possible through grace: And, though God be not bound, yet it is the usual practice of his free grace, to help those that are serious and diligent in the use of means.

3. He requires nothing of any valuable consideration. As faith and repentance must be freely given, so they are of no such value as to make a purchase of mercy. Mercy is obtained, not on the account of our faith or repentance, as if there were any worth in them; but only on the account of the righteousness of Christ, which faith alone lays hold on; and repentance is required as a necessary qualification of the person to whom God will shew mercy. Yet with respect to us, God shews mercy freely. Nothing in us can move him to it; no not our misery; that is only an occasion mercy lays hold on. He shews mercy to such as are most unworthy, and to the blackest sinners. *He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy (k).* So that none are debarred, whatever their sins have been. To shew mercy freely, opens the door for the greatest and vilest sinners.

Confid. 4. Other sinners have actually obtained mercy upon these terms; and such as were as great sinners as any of you can be. The scripture is full of instances of this kind. Rachab, an harlot and idolater, obtained mercy: So did Manasseh, a monster of wickedness: So did the woman of Samaria, though a filthy unclean person: And Paul, though a persecutor and blasphemmer. *I was before a persecutor, says he, and a blasphemer, and injurious; but I obtained mercy (l).* Mercy hath rode in triumph, and been glorified upon some of the vilest sinners. It hath yearned upon fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, and the vilest among men, when they repented and returned to God. O admirable and astonishing! None were ever debarred from mercy on the account of the greatness or multitude of their sins. And why is it that God hath shewed mercy to some of the vilest sinners? Even that no vile sinner whatsoever might despair; and that the blackest sinners, who see their vileness and filthiness, may be encouraged to turn to God through Christ, in hopes of obtaining mercy as they have done. *Howbeit, says the apostle Paul, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (m).*

But what shall we do that we may obtain mercy? I give these directions.

1. Study

(k) Rom. ix. 18. (l) 1 Tim. i. 13. (m) 1 Tim. i. 16.

1. Study your need of mercy. You have many sins, in heart and life, of omission and commission: You are transgressors from the womb; and your sins are past reckoning; and it may be they are great in their nature, and sins of a deep aggravation. And you have many miseries, especially soul-miseries: You are under the loss and forfeiture of God's image, favour, and fellowship; under many dreadful heart-plagues, distance from God, &c. O the many miseries that are in your souls, as the bitter fruits of sin! O what need have you of mercy! Get the deep affecting sense of this. God bestows the alms of mercy on such as are indigent, poor and needy, in their own sense and feeling. *In him the fatherless findeth mercy (n).*

2. Be content to be indebted to free mercy for all that you need. When you seek peace, or pardon, or other blessings, you must expect all from mercy as the fountain. You cannot come to God, and say, Pay me what thou owest, or give me for my money. God pours his mercy into empty vessels. Labour therefore to be emptied of all opinion of proper merit. Away with all conceit of your own worth, and come to God as undeserving and ill-deserving creatures, and cast yourselves down at the feet of mercy, and be content to be debtors to it for all things pertaining to life and godliness.

3. Embrace the offers of mercy. Come and lay hold on divine mercy. Consent heartily to the gracious terms upon which God is willing to shew you mercy. 1. Renounce all iniquity. It is he that *confesseth and forsaketh his sins that shall have mercy*. Therefore say with Ephraim, *What have I to do any more with idols (o)?* There must be a habitual bent and disposition of heart against all sin, and a forsaking of all sin in the course of your life and conversation. *Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed (p).* 2. Embrace and close with Christ. All the special mercy of God is dispensed and conveyed only through him; for, *Of his fulness do all believers receive, and grace for grace; and unto every one of them is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ (q).* He is the channel of grace and mercy. In vain are all your expectations of mercy out of Christ. You may have temporal and common mercies, but not one drop of saving mercy till you be in Christ. All your sorrow and tears

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for

(n) Hof. xiv. 3. (o) Prov. xx. 13. Hof. xiv. 8. (p) Ezek. xviii. 30, 31. (q) John i. 16. Eph. iv. 7.

for sin, all your cries and groans to God, all your vows, purposes and promises of amendment, cannot obtain mercy. While you are out of Christ, your sins are a strong bar to mercy. Justice must have a satisfaction for your sins; and nothing you can do can satisfy; and Christ's satisfaction can never be put up to your account, you can have no benefit by it, till you have a saving union with him: And faith is the uniting grace; he *dwells in the heart by faith* (r). Therefore you must believe on his name, and receive him as he is offered, else you cannot obtain mercy. 3. Resign yourselves to God through Christ as your Lord and Sovereign. *Yield yourselves to the Lord* (s). Give yourselves wholly to him, and to his whole will, with a sincere purpose to obey him in all things, without exception.

4. Be frequent in prayer; and in prayer cry and plead for mercy. Let this be the sum of all your requests, that God would be merciful to you: As the Publican, *God be merciful to me a sinner* (t). God hath treasures of mercy; and prayer is a key to open these treasures.

Exhort. 4. Labour to get and maintain a deep sense of the mercy of God toward you. Doth not your own experience inform you what a merciful God he is? You have lived on mercy all your days. Divine mercy hath covered your table, preserved you in dangers, conducted you in difficulties, &c. Mercy hath done all. Particularly,

1. Consider how great and many his mercies have been. How many dangers have been prevented, deliverances vouchsafed, and blessings bestowed by divine mercy? Such of you especially as are the children of God, should often recount your experiences of divine mercy. God's mercies toward you are many and various. There are, 1. Preventing mercies. How often hath God preserved you from these sins and dangers you were ready to fall into? When you have been at an utter loss in your own thoughts, divine mercy hath unexpectedly found out means for your help. And though sometimes you have run yourselves into inconveniences by your own folly, yet even then mercy hath made a way for your escape. 2. Providing mercies. How often hath he supplied your wants, and made provision for you in your straits? 3. Directing mercies. How often hath he been a light to you in your darkness, and guided you in your doubts and perplexities? 4. Pardoning mercies. How often hath he forgiven, and mul-

(r) Eph. iii. 17. (s) 2 Chron. xxx. 8. (t) Luke xix. 42.

multiplied to pardon, and received you into favour after backsliding? 5. Strengthening and upholding mercies. How often hath he known your soul in adversity, supported you in your distresses, kept you from sinking under your burdens, strengthened you under temptations, and made his grace sufficient for you? 6. Recovering and delivering mercies. How often hath he brought you out of your distresses, bodily and spiritual, making the saddest night end in a joyful morning? 7. Sparing mercies. How often have you seen God's severity toward others, when he hath spared you? Others have been delivered up, when you were saved: They have been abandoned and exposed to misery, when you have been covered under the wings of mercy. In a word, in all the periods of your life, divine mercy hath still been at work for you. O what cause have you to cry out with the psalmist, *Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. And, how precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God? How great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand (u).*

2. That your sense of the mercy of God toward you may be the more deep and affecting, ponder your mercies in their various circumstances. Consider what a great and glorious God he is that hath been so merciful to you. You have no way obliged him; and he hath no need of you. Consider how unworthy you are to whom he hath shewed such favour and kindness. You are *not worthy of the least of all his mercies (x)*. Consider how seasonable his mercies have been. Your extremity hath often been his opportunity: *In the mount of the Lord it hath been seen (y)*.

3. Get a deep sense of your sins and miseries. This will best inform you of the greatness and tenderness of divine mercy. When you see that your sins are many, and your miseries and dangers great, then you will see that God's mercies toward you are also great. Hence the psalmist says, *Great is thy mercy towards me; and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell (z)*.

A deep sense of the mercy of God toward you will have many special advantages. As, 1. It will encourage you to prayer. "I know, say ye, by experience what a merciful God he is; I have tried him, and found him to be so."

Your

(u) Psal. xl. 5. and cxxxix. 17, 18.

(x) Gen. xxxii. 10.

(y) Gen. xxii. 14.

(z) Psal. lxxxvi. 15.

Your own experience being laid in the balance against your doubts and fears, will encourage you to go to God. 2. It will quicken you to praise and thanksgiving. Can you have a sense of so much mercy, and not think of a thankful return? When you see what matter of praise you have, your heart will be enlarged, and you will be apt to cry out with the psalmist, *Blessed be God who hath not turned away his mercy from me. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name: who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies* (a). 3. It will promote the exercise of repentance. Sense of mercy and kindness overcomes the heart. Saul wept when David had spared him (b). A sense of divine mercy will melt your heart for wrongs done to God. 4. It will frame your heart into a humble submission to the will of God in afflicting providences. When you come to a reckoning with God, O then, how great are his mercies? And how great is the sum of them? They are far greater, and more in number than your crosses. So that you must say with Job, *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil* (c)?

S E R M O N L I.

Exhort. 5. **T**HANKFULLY own and acknowledge the mercy of God for all the blessings you receive and enjoy. You are beholden to divine mercy for any endowments of body or mind; for wisdom, health, riches, honour, &c. And for all your gracious receipts and enjoyments: All spring from free mercy. Such of you as have been brought into favour with God, and are made partakers of Christ and his glorious purchase, it is mercy that hath done all for you. Mercy found thee a bundle of miseries, a poor out-cast, lying polluted in thine own blood. God saw no more in you than in others, why he should receive you into favour: You were unworthy of the least kindness. Yea, what God hath done for you, was not only without your merit, but against it: You were not only undeserving, but ill-deserving creatures. Consider what a great mercy it was, that God would take you into his service with all your faults. Yea, by daily sins you make a forfeiture of your blessings every day, if God should deal with you in a way of strict justice: But that he will pity your weakness and infirmities in his service, and continue his favour and good-will

(a) Psal. lxxvi. 20. and ciii. 1, 4.
(c) Job ii. 10.

(b) 1 Sam. xxiv. 16.

good-will toward you notwithstanding, all this is owing to free mercy. Therefore, humbly acknowledge your own unworthiness, as Jacob did (a): And give God the glory of his mercy. Renounce all opinion of proper worth and merit, and cast the crown down at the feet of mercy.

Exhort. 6. Improve the consideration of God's infinite mercy to quicken and encourage you to duty. And,

1. To engage you to love him. His mercy and compassion renders him amiable. You should love him, because he is merciful in himself, of such a compassionate nature, that he pities and is ready to relieve the miserable. O let this commend him to you. It should also be a great incentive to your love, that he hath let out so much of his mercy toward you. *I love the Lord, says the psalmist, because he hath heard my voice, &c (b).*

2. To encourage you to trust in him. His mercy renders him a fit object of trust. Hence the psalmist says, *I have trusted in thy mercy: And, I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever (c).* The power of God without his mercy, is not a sufficient foundation for trust. But when we consider that God is not only able to help and relieve us, but also ready to do what he is able, this invites and encourages us to trust in him. Therefore both together are laid down in my text, as the foundation of trust. Consider, 1. *God takes great pleasure in them that trust or hope in his mercy (d).* Trusting in him is pleasing to him, because it turns to the glory of that attribute which he most glories in. 2. This will be a mean to support you in your deepest distress. It will be as an anchor in a storm. Though you be tossed, you shall not be overset. 3. It will have blessed success: *For he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about (e).* Upon this the psalmist builds his confidence and hope of mercy; *I have trusted in thy mercy, says he; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation (f).*

Well then, trust in his mercy, even in the greatest extremities. When the church is brought very low, and her case is desperate like in the eye of man; yet trust in God's mercy: For in such cases God's great argument to relieve and deliver his people, is their great misery. *The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants; when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left (g).* Therefore they plead his mercy in their low state: *Let thy tender mercies speedily*

(a) Gen. xxxii. 10. (b) Psal. cxvi. 1. (c) Psal. xiii. 5. and lii. 8. (d) Psal. cxlvii. 11. (e) Psal. xxxii. 10. (f) Psal. xiii. 5. (g) Deut. xxxii. 36.

ly prevent us ; for we are brought very low (b). Again, in your own personal miseries and distresses, outward or inward, trust in the mercy of God, though you have no merit of your own. Your former experiences may encourage you to this : You have formerly trusted in his mercy, and it never failed you ; and you have the same grounds of trust still. Therefore humbly own and acknowledge your own sinfulness and unworthiness, and trust in the mercy of God through the Mediator Christ (i).

3. To encourage you to prayer. You have heard that the Lord is a God of infinite mercy : O how should this encourage you to go to him in all your wants, straits and distresses : The saints have encouraged themselves to prayer from the consideration of the divine mercy. Hence the psalmist pleads, *Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord : Quicken me according to thy judgments (k).* Mercy is no less acceptable to God than to you : What then should hinder you from going to him continually for help and relief ? We read, that when Joab perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom, then he set the woman of Tekoah to make request for him (l). The King's heart is set upon mercy : Your requests gratify his bowels. Therefore be encouraged to go to him for all needful blessings. His mercy is a fountain inexhaustible. He is *the Father of mercies* : He doth not waste by giving. And it is a fountain always running : It is ever open, not sealed or shut up. His mercies are *new every morning (m).* He is always giving out new blessings ; so that you may come and fare liberally every day. Improve former experiences for your encouragement in prayer. You have often obtained mercy in answer to prayer ; surely he will shew you mercy still : And he that had pity upon you, when you were lying in your blood ; will he not much more pity you now, when you are in Christ, and received into favour through him ?

4. To quicken you to praise and thanksgiving. There is a difference between these two, if strictly considered : Praise respects God's own excellencies ; thanksgiving respects the mercies and benefits bestowed upon us. Well then, 1. Praise him for what he is in himself ; a God of infinite mercy, of tender bowels, full of compassion. You should be heralds to proclaim his praises. Speak good of his worthy name. The vessels of mercy should run over with praise. Impart to others your experiences

(b) Psal. lxxix. 8. (i) 2 Cor. iii. 4. (k) Psal. cxix. 156.
(l) 2 Sam. xiv. 1. (m) Lam. iii. 23.

periences of divine mercy, that they may be encouraged to go to the same Fountain. So did the psalmist, *Come and hear*, says he, *all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul* (n). This is the way to make his praise live, when you are dead. 2. Give thanks for his manifold mercies. Be thankful even for common mercies: For as these are valuable in themselves, so being thankfully improved, they fit us for special and saving mercies. When we suspect a vessel to be leaky, we try it with water before we fill it with wine. By common mercies you are put upon your trial: Be thankful for these, and God will give you better; this is his usual practice in his way towards his people. But especially, be thankful for spiritual and saving mercies; for your redemption by Christ, and all the blessings of it. *Thanks be unto God*, says the apostle, *for his unspeakable gift* (o). The greatest mercies deserve the greatest acknowledgments. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ* (p). O consider what a merciful God he hath been to you, and let this quicken you to praise and thanksgiving. Can you receive so much, and never think of a thankful return? By new mercies God gives new matter of praise and thanksgiving. The mercies of the day make way for songs in the night; and the mercies of the night give songs in the morning. When we thankfully acknowledge God for mercies received, this makes the fountain of mercy to overflow with new supplies of mercy. Observe your mercies, and ponder them in their various circumstances. Consider the numerousness of them: *They are new every morning*. Consider your own unworthiness: *You are not worthy of the least of all his mercies*. And, consider the seasonableness of them: *He makes every thing beautiful in his time* (q).

Exhort. 7. Study to imitate God in his mercy. *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful* (r). It is not only your duty, but your glory and dignity, to imitate God in shewing mercy. And this is the way to obtain mercy: *Blessed are the merciful*, says our Saviour, *for they shall obtain mercy* (s). And, 1. Be merciful to all that are in distress or misery. (1.) Be compassionate toward them. Your helping and relieving others is not mercy, unless it arise from a motion in the bowels. You must *draw out your soul to the hungry* (s). Dear Christians,

pus

(n) Psal. lxvi. 16. (o) 2 Cor. ix. 15. (p) Eph. i. 3. (q) Lam. iii. 23. Gen. xxxii. 10. Eccl. iii. 11. (r) Luke vi. 36. (s) Mat. v. 7. (s) Isa. lviii. 10.

put on bowels of mercies, as the elect of God (t). Be tender-hearted. To be insensible of the miseries of others, is unsuitable to your condition, both as men, and as Christians. (2.) Help and relieve them in their wants and distresses. It is not enough to say to a brother or sister in distress, *Be warmed and filled*, when ye give them not those things which are needful to the body (u). Give to him that asketh; lend to him that would borrow; and relieve and refresh the bowels of them that are in misery †. Be liberal and bountiful. *He who soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly: and he who soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully* (x). The hardness and niggardliness of many of you who are professors of religion, is a reproach to your profession, and hardens the hearts of sinners from entertaining the gospel: But your feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, may be a mean to save many a soul from death, by commending true religion to them. 2. More especially, be compassionate and merciful to the souls of men. Soul miseries are the greatest. Pity them that cannot pity themselves. Have compassion on sin-burdened souls and wounded spirits: For, *the spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity: But a wounded spirit who can bear* (y)? 3. Let your compassion be exercised and extended especially to the suffering members of Christ. You must not be at ease when they are in trouble. *Weep with them that weep. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body* (z). There must be a tender sympathy; for, *if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it* (a).

Use 4. For direction in prayer. This doctrine of the mercy of God may be of use to direct us in our addresses to him. In prayer, lay open your griefs, miseries, and distresses before God, and plead mercy.

1. Lay open your griefs, miseries, and distresses before God; even all the sad evils in your case. This hath been the practice

(t) Col. iii. 12. (u) James ii. 15, 16.

† *Plus est aliquando compati quam dare: Nam qui exteriora largitur, rem extra se positam tribuit; qui compassionem, aliquid sui ipsius dat.* Greg. Mor. 20.

A compassionate man's heart is like the noble tree, that is wounded itself when it gives the balm. Lord Bacon, *Essay* 13.

Clemens dicitur animus, quando est tener ad compatiendum, facilis ad remittendum, promptus ad subveniendum. Hugo de S. Viêt.

Sic mens per compassionem doleat, ut larga manus affectum doloris ostendat. Greg.

(x) 2 Cor. ix. 6. (y) Prov. xviii. 14. (z) Rom. xii. 15. Heb. xiii. 3.

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 26.

tice of the saints (b) True it is, God needs no information about your case, as if he were ignorant of it. He knows more of you than you do yourselves. But the laying open your miseries and distresses before God in prayer, is a silent and tacit plea for mercy. When you come and represent your sad case to God, though you have nothing else to plead, it is a mean to work upon his bowels. Hence the psalmist pleads, *I am poor and sorrowful : Let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high* (c). As beggars uncover their sores to move pity; so, when we shew before God our sad case, this very thing is a plea for mercy; for he is *a God full of compassion* (d).

2. Plead mercy. This is the practice of the saints in scripture. Thus the psalmist pleads: *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy : And Daniel, We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies* (e). This is the great argument. Let the mercy of God be all your plea, when you come to seek any thing from him. You are unworthy of any favour. There is nothing in you to move God to be gracious to you, but much to the contrary. You deserve to be abhorred, and to be cast out of his presence. Therefore let never a word of merit be in your mouth, but only mercy †. You can claim no good upon any other right or title. Sinners can expect nothing but upon terms of mercy. Therefore come humbly, and plead mercy. Say with the publican, *God be merciful to me a sinner* (f). Yea, the best of the children of God have no other claim. All their supplies come to them, not in the way of merit, but of undeserved mercy. They are *vessels of mercy* (g); from first to last, filled up with mercy. Your greatest goodness is unprofitable to God: Your holiest services are attended with many imperfections, and mixed with much sin: And whatever good you have, is from God, and is rather his than yours. Therefore, in all your addresses to God, renounce your own worthiness, and plead mercy. But see that you seek mercy in the way of faith in Christ: For all the mercies of the covenant are exhibited in and by him, in whom the covenant is made with us: Hence they are called *the sure mercies of David* (h); that is, of Christ, of whom David was an eminent type.

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Use

(b) See Psal. vi. 2, 3, and xxxviii. 4,—8. and cxlii. 2 (c) Psal. lxix. 29. (d) See Jer. xxxi. 18, 19, 20. Psal. lxxxvi. 15. (e) Psal. cxix. 124 Dan. ix. 18.

† *Meritum meum, miseratione Domini.* Bern. in Cant. Serm. 61.

(f) Luke xviii. 13. (g) Rom. ix. 23. (h) Isa. lv. 3.

Use 5. For encouragement to poor sensible sinners. Such persons are often so frightened and discouraged with the sense and apprehension of the greatness and multitude of their sins, that they will not be persuaded to repent, and to believe in Christ. They are apt to conclude that there is no mercy for the like of them. None are in nearer capacity to take the right way to get mercy, and yet none are more apt to exclude themselves from mercy than sensible sinners. "O, was there ever such a vile wretch as I am? Is it possible that I can obtain mercy?" But consider, I beseech you, that the Lord is a God of infinite mercy. There is store of mercy in him; and he delights in mercy; and he shews mercy freely, without any desert on our part. Therefore be encouraged to come to him through Christ for mercy, how vile and unworthy soever you be. Though God were niggardly and tenacious of his gifts and benefits, yet, such is your want and necessity, that it should make you very earnest and importunate: But when you hear that he is infinite in mercy, O how should this encourage you! Let me allude to what Benhadad's servants said unto him: You have heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God, and delights in mercy; therefore come and try what he will do for you (i). This is the great motive to repentance: *Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: For I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.* And, *Turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful (k).* Come and cast yourselves down at God's feet, and try what infinite mercy will do for you. Lay the great and tender mercy of God in the balance against your doubts and fears. The more sensible of your misery, you are the fitter objects for mercy. There is mercy with God even for the vilest sinners that come to him by Christ. Yea, though God be justly angry with you, and punish you for your sins, yet you may encourage yourselves to plead for mercy; for even when he reckons with you for your sins, yet his wrath doth not so far transport him, as to make him forget his merciful nature: *In wrath he remembers mercy (l).*

But, O, says the sinner, it can never enter into my thoughts that ever God will shew mercy to the like of me. I answer, But why may not you try whether he will shew you mercy or not? O sinners, come and try him, and then tell me what a God you have found him to be. And, for your encouragement, know, that never any tried him, but found him to be a God of infinite mercy.

DISCOURSE

(i) 1 Kings xx. 31. (k) Jer. iii. 12. Joel ii. 13. (l) Hab. iii. 2.

DISCOURSE XII.

Of the Truth and Faithfulness of God.

SERMON LII.

Psal. cviii. 4. — *Thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.*

IN the preceding verses, we have the psalmist's fixed resolution to praise God ; and in this verse we have the matter of his praises, viz. God's mercy and truth. I am to speak from the latter clause of the verse, *Thy truth reacheth unto the clouds* ; or, *Thy truth is great unto the clouds* : For the verb *reacheth* is not in the original text, being only inserted by way of supplement by our translators ; but the words run better without it. *Thy mercy is great above the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds* ; that is, it is great unto the clouds ; so great, that we poor finite creatures are not able to comprehend it. It is far above our reach ; greater and higher than we can apprehend. So it is expressed also in that parallel place, *Thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds* (a). We may sooner think to reach the clouds with our short arm, than to comprehend the truth of God in our finite understanding. It is infinite and incomprehensible.

In prosecuting this purpose, I shall,

1. *Prove that truth is an essential attribute of God.*
2. *Shew in what sense it is attributed to him.*
3. *Hold forth that God is incomparable in his truth.*
4. *Make application of this head.*

First, Truth is often attributed to God in scripture. I might multiply texts to this purpose. How often do we read of God's truth ? Hence he is called *the true God* (b), and *the God of truth* (c) ; and Christ is called, *He that is true* (d), and *the faithful and true witness* (e). His name is *faithful and true* (f). And the Holy Spirit is called *the Spirit of truth* (g). The saints do frequently praise God for his *truth*, especially in the Book of Psalms. And God's mercy and truth are often joined together,

(a) Psal. lvii. 10. (b) Jer x. 10. 1 John v. 20. (c) Deut. xxxii. 4. Psal. xxxi. 6. Isa. lxv. 16. (d) Rev. iii. 7. (e) Rev. iii. 14. (f) Rev. xix. 11. (g) John xvi. 13.

gether, as here in my text, and elsewhere (b). The reason is, because there is mercy in making the promises, and truth in performing them: Truth fulfils the promises, and Mercy removes out of the way what might mar and obstruct the accomplishment: Mercy remedies all evils to believers, and Truth puts them in possession of all promised good.

Truth is inseparable from the notion of God. The very Heathens, by Nature's light, have owned it. It was an observable saying of a philosopher †, "That truth is so great a perfection of the divine nature, that if God should render himself visible unto men, he would chuse light for his body, and truth for his soul." And the same philosopher tells us ‡, that it was one of the precepts of Pythagoras †, That "men should chiefly speak truth; because this alone was able to make men resemble God." And Plato lays down this as a certain truth §, That "lying and falsehood are imperfections, and odious to God and men." The Heathens ascribed a double perfection to their gods, to wit ||, That "they did well to men, and spoke truth." So, the true God is known by nothing so much as his goodness and truth. This is one remarkable letter in his name, as he himself proclaimed it before Moses, *The Lord God,—abundant in goodness and truth* (i). His truth is a precious jewel in his crown. To be a man of truth, a man of his word, is an honourable character. The glory of a man is his credit: So, the truth of God is the glory of God. It is a title that God hath joined with his honour as a Creator: As in that of the psalmist, *The Lord, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, who keepeth truth for ever* (k). The truth of God is the varnish, splendor and glory of all his other perfections. He is truly infinite, truly all-sufficient, truly eternal. His goodness, is true goodness; his wisdom, true wisdom; his holiness, true holiness. As sincerity is the beauty of all graces; so truth is the lustre of all the divine perfections. ✓

But,

Secondly, Let me clear to you in what sense truth is attributed

(b) Psal. lvii. 3. and lxxxv. 10 and lxxxvi. 15. and xcvi. 3.

† Porphy. in Vita Pythag.

• U. S.

‡ Μαλιστα δ' ἀληθείην; τὸ γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι τὰς ἀνθρώπους ποῦν θεῶν παρὰ πλησίον.

§ Τὸ μὲν ψῦδος ἢ μόνον ἀπὸ θεῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται.

Plato de Repub. Lib. 2.

|| Εὐεργετὴν καὶ ἀληθεύον.

(i) Exod. xxxiv. 6.

(k) Psal. cxlvi. 6.

ed to God. Schoolmen and divines distinguish truth into metaphysical, logical, and moral truth, and apply these to the purpose in hand. But that I may speak plainly, I omit these philosophical terms, and shall shew you that God is, 1. True in himself. 2. True to himself. And, 3. True toward the creatures.

1. God is true in himself. And that, 1. As he hath a true being and existence. Hence he is called the true God, in opposition to idols and false gods (*l*): They are gods, only by fancy or fiction; but he is God by nature and essence. He is God indeed, and not in imagination only. O, how comfortable is it to consider what a God we serve! Search the nations; *Among all the gods there is none like our God (m)*.

2. God is true in himself, as he is the first, chief, and greatest truth; and consequently, the square, rule, measure, and standard of all truth: And as he is the unchangeable archetype and idea of all true things without himself; so that things are true, as they agree with the ideas or patterns of them in the mind of God; for, *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world (n)*. 3. God is true in himself, as he hath a true and not an erroneous conceit and apprehension of things: For, he knows all things most exactly and perfectly: *All things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (o)*.

2. God is true to himself; as he punctually accomplisheth his eternal decrees, counsels and purposes. Of this the Psalmist speaks; *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations (p)*: And the Lord by the prophet, *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: And, The Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand; And, the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it (q)*.

God cannot be deceived or disappointed in any of his purposes. There is a difference between the purposes and promises of God. His promises are declarations of his purpose. In fulfilling his promises, he is true to the creature: But in accomplishing his purposes, he is true to himself. God is true, and cannot deny his own counsel; for, that were to deny himself, and that eternal idea in his own mind. His truth engages his power, wisdom, and other attributes, to act agreeably

(*l*) 1 Theff. i. 9. Jer. x. 9, 10. (*m*) Psal. lxxxvi. 8. (*n*) Acts xv. 18. (*o*) Heb. iv. 13. (*p*) Psal. xxxiii. 11. (*q*) Isa. xli. 10. and xiv. 24, 27.

greeably to his immutable counsel, and the eternal resolutions in his own mind : And herein he cannot possibly fail ; for, as he can never be at any loss for want of means to execute his purposes, so no created power hath strength enough to be a bar in his way.

3. God is true toward the creatures ; and that both in his works, and in his words.

(1.) God is true in his works, both of creation and providence ; and that both in his ordinary works of providence, in preserving and governing the creatures ; and extraordinary, such as the work of redemption, miraculous works, and the wonderful preservation of, and deliverances granted to his church. He is true in all these. *The works of his hands are verity and judgment : They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness* (r). It is a part of the church's song, *Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints : And, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments* (s). All God's works are true and real things, not chimeras or appearances. He executes true judgments, grants true deliverances, works true miracles. His mercies, are true mercies : his comforts, true comforts. He doth not deceive or delude his people with vain shews or appearances. Again, all his works are true, because congruous to the first truth : For, the creatures have first an ideal being in him, before they have a real being in themselves.

(2) God is true in his words. This is called his veracity, which respects every declaration of his mind, and consists in an exact conformity between his word and his mind, and consequently between his word and the truth and reality of things. The former depends upon the rectitude of his will : The latter partly upon the rectitude of his will, and partly upon the certainty and infallibility of his knowledge. So that when we say, God is true, or speaks truth, the meaning is, that his words are a plain declaration of his mind, without lying, dissimulation, or hypocrisy ; and a true representation of things, without any mixture of falsehood. He speaks nothing but as the thing is, and as he doth conceive it. He is true in his word, † in his whole word. His word is most pure truth. This is expressed sometimes affirmatively : As when it is said, *Thy words be true* ; and, *Thy word is truth*. And sometimes negatively : As, when it is said that God is *not a man*,
that

(r) Psal. cxi. 7, 8. (s) Rev. xv. 3 and xvi. 17.

† *Singula Dei verba sunt juramenta.* Philo,

that he should lie; That the Strength of Israel will not lie; and that it is impossible for God to lie (t).

Particularly, God is true, 1. In the doctrines he hath revealed. There is in them no flaw or corruption. They are the form of sound words (u). More particularly, he is true in the doctrine of the gospel. Hence we read of the truth of the gospel; and the gospel is called the word of truth, and the word of the truth of the gospel (x). Some of the doctrines revealed are above reason, but none of them contrary to it. 2. In the historical narrations he hath recorded; as these of the creation, of the fall of man, of Christ's incarnation, life and death. In these, and other historical narrations in the word of God, there is no lie nor mistake. Hence Luke says, in his preface to his history, *It seemed good to me to write unto thee, that thou mightest know the certainty of these things wherein thou hast been instructed* (y). 3. In his prophetical predictions, none of them fail, or come short of their accomplishment. They all come to pass in their season. *Heaven and earth shall pass away*, but his words shall not pass away (z). And the Lord tells the prophet, *The vision is for an appointed time, but in the end it shall speak and not lie* (a). And after divers prophetical predictions, it is said, *These sayings are faithful and true* (b). 4. In his commands. *All his commandments are faithful*: And his Law is truth. All his commandments are counter-pains of his heart, real copies of his approving will. The matter of them is consonant to his holiness, and acceptable and well-pleasing in his eyes. God approves what he commands: So that his commands are a true and perfect rule of holiness, without any defect. 5. In his threatenings. They are always accomplished in their season: *Not one of them shall fail* (d). Says the Lord to that people, *Did not my words take hold of your fathers?* And the apostle tells us, *We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that commit such things* (e). True it is, some threatenings are conditional, and to be understood with the exception of repentance, so that repentance prevents the execution of them, as is clear in the case of Nineveh (f). And from Jer. xviii. 6, 7 But divine threatenings shall certainly be executed upon impenitent and incorrigible sinners.

(t) 2 Sam. vii. 28. John. xvii. 7. Numb. xxiii. 19. 1 Sam. xv. 29. Heb. vi. 18. (u) 2 Tim. i. 13. (x) Gal. ii. 5. Eph. i. 13. Col. i. 5. (y) Luke i. 3, 4. (z) Matth. xxiv. 35. (a) Hab. ii. 3. (b) Rev. xxii. 6. (c) Psal. cxix. 86. (d) Isa. xxxiv. 16. (e) Zech. i. 6. Rom. ii. 2. (f) Jona

sinners. 6. In his promises. Therefore promised blessings are called *Sure mercies*; and the gospel, which is the compend of all the promises, is often called *The word of truth* (g). Now the truth of God in the promises takes in these two things. (1.) Sincerity in making the promise. When God makes a promise, he means as he speaks, and hath a firm purpose to perform. To make a promise with an intention to deceive, is to lie, and cannot be imagined of the blessed God; For, *He is not a man that he should lie* (h). What need hath God to court worms, or to flatter them into vain hopes? The infinite purity and holiness of his nature cannot admit this. So it is said, *God, that cannot lie, promised* (i). (2.) Firmness and constancy in keeping promise. When a man makes a promise, he may have a sincere purpose to perform it, and make it without any intention to deceive, and yet fail in making it good. But God cannot and will not fail; for, *Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? All the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ* (k). Now the truth of God is most frequently taken in this sense in scripture; and in this his faithfulness doth peculiarly consist: Therefore I shall speak a little to it.

The truth and faithfulness of God differ, according to our manner of conceiving. His faithfulness is one branch of his truth, and doth chiefly denote his firmness in keeping promise. Hence it is said, *He is faithful that promised*: And it is said of Sarah, *She judged him faithful who had promised*. In this sense especially he is called *the faithful God* (l). Now, his faithfulness is incomprehensible: It *reacheth unto the clouds* (m): And it is greatly admired by the saints even in the darkest times. Hence the church, under the captivity, cries out, *Great is thy faithfulness* (n). It is great, and great unto the heavens; so great, that our shallow capacity cannot fathom it.

I shall here, for the confirmation of the faith of believers in God's word of promise, 1. Give some evidences of God's faithfulness and truth in keeping promise. 2. Assign some grounds of it.

1. The truth and faithfulness of God in keeping promise appears in these things:

(1.) In expressing a greater tenderness of his word than of his works. He *hath magnified his word above all his name* (o).
God

(g) Isa. lv. 3. Eph. i. 13. James i. 18. (h) Numb. xxiii. 19.
(i) Titus i. 2. (k) Numb. xxiii. 19. 2 Cor. i. 20. (l) Heb. x. 23.
and xi. 11. Deut. vii. 9. (m) Psal. xxxvi. 5. (n) Lam. iii. 23.
(o) Psal. cxxxviii. 2.

God will rather break heaven and earth into pieces than not be as good as his word. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, says our Lord, but my word shall not pass away (p).* Believers shall enjoy the comfort of the promises in heaven, when all these things shall be dissolved.

(2.) In making good these promises that were of oldest date, and might seem to be forgotten. God had promised to Abraham (q), That his seed, after they had sojourned and been afflicted in a strange land four hundred years, should come out again with great substance: And the years that preceded that affliction, viz. from the making of the first promise, or from the confirmation thereof by the gift of Isaac, make up four hundred and thirty years. Now, God had not forgotten this promise four hundred and thirty years after it was made, but punctually performed it, as Moses tells us: *And it came to pass, at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even in the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt (r).* So also, God promised to bring back the captivity of Babylon after seventy years; and he made it good. No length of time can wear out the remembrance of his promise: *He remembered his holy promise, says the psalmist, and Abraham his servant (s).*

(3.) In accomplishing the promises concerning the Messiah. So it is said, *Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (t).* Grace, in regard of our pardon; and truth, in regard of the promise. Particularly, his truth and faithfulness in keeping promise appears, 1. In performing the promise of Christ's incarnation. After so many revolutions of time, and many expectations of his coming, and many contrary appearances, and a long stay of four thousand years after the first promise: After all this, God made good his promise, by sending his Son into the world. This was a confirmation of all the rest of the promises, as the apostle tells us: *Jesus Christ was a Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers (u).* The performance of that great promise was a pawn and pledge of the performance of all the rest: For no promise could be thought of greater difficulty for God to perform, or for his people to believe, than the promise of the Messiah as the seed of the woman. 2. In performing the promise of Christ's death and sufferings. God had passed his word to the church, that his Son should suffer death and the wrath of God for elect sin-

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ners:

(p) Luke xxi. 33. (q) Gen. xv. 13, 14. (r) Exod. xii. 41.
(s) Psal. cv. 42. (t) John i. 17. (u) Rom. xv. 8.

ners: And having once passed his word for this, he would not spare him. He *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all* (x). Rather than God should break his word, his own dear Son must suffer a painful, shameful and cursed death in his body, and the wrath of God in his innocent soul.

(4.) In fulfilling his promises, when great difficulties and seeming improbabilities lay in the way of the accomplishment. So, he brought back the captivity from Babylon, though it seemed most improbable and unlikely, and great difficulties lay in the way. Again, God promised to Abraham a son; and he made it good, though Sarah was barren, and both Abraham and she were past age. God is not tied to the rod of human probabilities. He will turn nature upside down, rather than not be as good as his word.

(5.) The truth and faithfulness of God in keeping promise is confirmed by the testimonies given thereunto by the saints in all ages. They have all witnessed for God that he is faithful. So did Moses: *Know, therefore, says he, that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him* (y). And Joshua tells the children of Israel, *Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof* (z). And Solomon testifies, *There hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant* (a). And the psalmist tells us, *He keepeth truth for ever* (b). All learned men are for experiments. Now, the saints in all ages have made experiments upon God's word of promise, and have always found him to be true and faithful. *The word of the Lord is tried* (c). None that relied on his promise were ever disappointed.

2. I proceed to assign some grounds of God's faithfulness. There are divers glorious attributes and perfections of God upon which truth and faithfulness in keeping promise is built, as so many strong and unshaken pillars. As,

(1.) His perfect knowledge of all things past. His knowledge is called a *book of remembrance* (d), to signify the continual presence of all things past before him. Men do oftentimes break their word, because they forget what they promised: But forgetfulness cannot befall a God of infinite knowledge. *He will ever be mindful of his covenant, and remembers his holy covenant and promise* (e).

He

(x) Rom. viii. 32.

(y) Deut. vii. 9.

(z) Josh. xxiii. 14.

(a) 1 Kings viii. 56.

(b) Psal. cxlvi. 6.

(c) Psal. xviii. 30.

(d) Mal. iii. 16. (e) Psal. cxi. 5. and cv. 8, 42. and cvi. 45. Luke i. 72.

(2.) His immutability. Though men in making promises may have a real purpose to perform, yet they may afterward change their purpose. But God is always firm to his purpose, and cannot change his mind, because of his unchangeable nature. *I am the Lord, says he, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (f). With him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning (g).* Again, men are often inconsiderate in making promises, and do often meet with what they did not foresee: But as all events are eternally foreseen by God; so all his promises are made with infinite wisdom and judgment. So that promise runs, *I will betroth thee unto me for ever: Yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment. Therefore for ever, because in judgment (h).*

(3.) His power. Sometimes men would perform their promises, but are some way disabled: But *the strength of Israel will not lie (i): And, With God all things are possible (k).* Upon this Abraham's faith was bottomed: *He was strong in faith giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform (l).* God can do *whatever he pleaseth to do (m).* In the case of civil debts, many a man cannot keep his promise, because others break to him: But, though the whole creation should break, God is as able as ever. Hence the prophet says, *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, &c. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, &c (n).* Believers in Christ can never be undone, though the whole creation should go to ruin.

(4.) His holiness. Some men are so wicked, that though they can, yet they will not keep promise: But God cannot be charged with any wickedness: *There is no unrighteousness in him (o).* By reason of the perfect holiness of his nature, he *cannot lie (p).* The deceitfulness and treachery of men flows from the corruption of their natures; but the divine nature is infinitely pure and holy.

(5.) His justice and righteousness. By a promise a man hath a right to the thing promised; so that it is his due; and justice requires to give every one their due. So, God by his promise makes himself a debtor; and his justice obliges him to pay. Hence it is said, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (q).* He is faithful to pardon, as he hath promised

(f) Mal. iii. 6. (g) James i. 17. (h) Hosea ii. 19. (i) 1 Sam. xv. 29. (k) Matth. xix. 26. (l) Rom. iv. 21. (m) Psal. cxxxv. 6. (n) Hab. iii. 17, 18. (o) Psal. xcii. 15. (p) Titus i. 2. (q) 1 John i. 9.

mised it; and faithful in keeping promise, because he is just. Though it was his mercy and goodness to make the promise, yet his justice binds him to make it good. It is true, when God makes himself a debtor by his promise, it is indeed a debt of grace; yet it is a debt, which it is just for God to pay. Therefore his word of promise is called *the word of his righteousness* (r).

These are the strong pillars upon which God's truth and faithfulness in keeping promise is built. He can as soon cease to be omniscient, unchangeable, almighty, infinitely holy and just, as he can cease to be true and faithful.

Thus I have shewed you in what sense truth is attributed to God. Now,

Thirdly, I come to shew that God is incomparable in his truth. He is true in such a way as none else is true. Therefore, he hath this title and epithet given to him twice in one verse, *he that is true* (s): As if none else were true but he; because there is none true like him, none true in comparison of him. Yea, says the apostle, *let God be true, but every man a liar* (t). In comparison of God, all men are liars; because they are but mutable creatures, and liable to temptations, and so may be induced to deceive others. Particularly, 1. God is essentially true. His truth is essential and necessary to him. He can as soon cease to be God as cease to be true. Yea, his truth is his very essence: It is his nature. He is not only true, but truth itself. 2. He is originally true. He is the first truth, and the first cause of all truth. Truth is originally from him. He is the rule, measure, and standard of all truth (u). 3. He is perfectly true, without any mixture or shadow of falsehood. *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all* (x). As God is light itself, and admits not of any darkness: So, he is truth itself, and can admit of no mixture of falsehood †. 4. He is infinitely true; most true. We cannot set bounds and limits to his truth. So in the text, *His truth reacheth unto the clouds*. That is, it is infinite, boundless, and unmeasurable. He is true above all measure, beyond all degrees. Hence, he is said to be *abundant in truth*, and *plenteous in truth*. *Great is his faithfulness*: But how great, none can conceive, much less express. So may the words in my text be read, as I observed already: *Thy truth is great*

(r) Psal. cxix. 123. (s) 1 John v. 20. (t) Rom. iii. 4.
(u) John xiv. 6. (x) 1 John i. 5.

† *Veritas sine fallacia, bonitas sine malitia, felicitas sine miseria.*
Fulgent.

great unto the clouds (y) : Infinitely, and consequently incomprehensibly great. 5. He is immutably true. He cannot lie ; and, it is impossible for him to lie (z). His truth is constant and stable, though men prove false and treacherous. In this sense it is said, *Let God be true, but every man a liar* : And if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful ; he cannot deny himself (a). He cannot break his word. He cannot repent or change his mind. His own nature lays him under an utter impossibility of deceiving. 6. He is eternally true, his truth is the same from everlasting to everlasting : For, *the truth of the Lord endureth for ever* : And, *his truth endureth to all generations* : And, *he keepeth truth for ever* (b).

S E R M O N LIII.

Fourth, I Proceed to the application.

Use 1. For instruction, in two particulars.

Instr. 1. See here what a firm foundation we have for our faith, in believing the truth of what is revealed in the holy scriptures : For the holy scriptures are the word of the God of truth, the word of him that cannot lie. God neither is nor can be deceived, nor can he possibly deceive any : Therefore if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is infinitely greater. O what a profound regard is due to the testimony of the God of truth ! And this testimony we have in the holy scriptures. So that the truth of God is the unmoveable rock on which our faith is built : And we may confidently venture our souls upon this bottom.

Instr. 2. Hence we see also, that the reformed protestant religion, is the only true religion ; because built on the infallible truth and veracity of God. Blessed be God, it is not built upon such sandy foundations, as human unwritten traditions, or any human testimony whatsoever : It is built upon the God of truth, and not upon fallible men. We admit the testimony of the true church, as an help to our faith, not the ground and foundation of it. The precious truths we believe, we receive them not upon the testimony of churches, popes, or councils ; but upon the testimony of the God of truth, who cannot lie. But the popish religion hath no sure foundation.

The

(y) Exod. xxxiv. 6. Psal. lxxxvi. 15. Lam. iii. 23. (z) Titus i. 2. Heb. vi. 18.

(a) Rom. iii. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 13. (b) Psal. cxvii. 2. and c. 5. and cxlvi. 6.

The faith of papists is built upon the testimony of men; so that their religion hath no more certainty in it, than these men have of infallibility.

Use 2. For reproof. To such as practically deny the truth of God, or disparage and blemish his truth and veracity. And,

1. Men of atheistical spirits reject many revealed truths, because, forsooth, they are above the reach of their frail reason. Is it not a plain denial of the truth of God, when men will not believe God upon his word, but set up their own reason as judge, what they should believe, and what not? How foolish are vain men in this? Even Adam, in innocency, was unfit to controul the doctrines of God; much more are we whose natures are depraved and corrupted by sin. How base is it to set up reason, a finite principle, yea, a corrupted and blind reason, against the infinite wisdom and truth of God?

2. Many professors of religion do not come up to a full persuasion of the truth of what is revealed in the word of God. Some content themselves with a bare conjecture and mere probability of the truth; and therefore do usually conform themselves to these opinions and practices that are generally received in the age and generation wherein they live. Others satisfy themselves with a mere opinion. They have a rational conviction of the truths of the word; but their faith doth not prevail against doubts and heart-atheism. They do not know and believe assuredly that these things are so (a). This is to deny to God the glory of his truth.

3. Profane men do not believe threatenings of judgment. Their not trembling at them is a plain evidence of this. I am afraid that too many among us have not so much faith as the very devils have, *who believe and tremble* (b). Many have not the awe of threatened judgments upon their hearts. They look on divine threatenings as mere scarecrows to fright men. This is to *belie the Lord*; as that people are said to have done: *They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not he, neither shall evil come upon us, neither shall we see sword nor famine* (c). Yea, too many mock and scoff at threatenings, as if they would dare God to do his utmost, and thought to be stronger than he: For thus they speak, *Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it*: And, *Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now* (d).

4. Many

(a) John vi. 69. (b) James ii. 19. (c) Jer. v. 12. (d) Isa. v. 19. (e) Jer. xvii. 15.

4. Many will venture nothing upon the precious promises. They are all for this present world, present enjoyments and comforts. These things in hand are better to them than all the promises of better things to come: Like Demas, who *loved this present world* (e). Many will venture much upon a human security, but reckon God's nothing worth. They can entrust their whole stock into the hands of a factor beyond sea, though they never saw him; but will venture nothing upon the word of the God of truth.

5. Many reject an offered Christ; they will not believe on him, nor receive him. Some sinners, under the deep sense of their own vileness and unworthiness, will not be persuaded of the riches and freedom of the grace of God in Christ. Many will not believe the report made of Christ in the gospel: Either they doubt of his ability, and look on their case as desperate; or, they doubt of his good-will, and cannot think that ever he will look toward such vile wretches as they are. Thus, many dispute themselves from believing. This is to give the God of truth the lie: For, *he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son* (f).

6. Even believers themselves have cause to be ashamed that they give the God of truth so little credit. Alas, how often do the changes in your outward lot weaken your faith and trust in God? Under crosses, difficulties, and temptations, you are often at an utter loss, and your faith fails you. Oh, how little credit do you give to the promises, though you have not only God's word, but his writ, and his oath, and his great seals appended to the charter of the covenant? God hath promised that he will be with you in trouble, that he will never leave you nor forsake you, that he will make all your troubles work for good unto you, and bring them all to a blessed and happy issue: But by your despondency and discouragement under trouble, you give the lie to God; you carry so as if these were but words of course, without any intent to make them good. Two things you are apt to suspect, 1. God's sincerity in making the promise; as if he were not in earnest when he promiseth such and such blessings, and had no sincere purpose to perform. 2. His truth in keeping promise; especially when straits press you, and great difficulties lie in the way of the accomplishment. Oh, how hardly do you trust God upon his word.

Thus we see that there are divers ways whereby men blemish the truth of God, or practically deny it, and give him the lie.

(e) 2 Tim. iv. 10. (f) 1 John v. 10.

lie. What is this, but to strip God of the glory of his nature? Seeing he can as soon cease to be God, as cease to be true. To give the lie to an inferior, is incivility; to a superior, it is insolence; But to a king, it is a kind of treason. Yet this may be done without dethroning him: But to give the lie to God, is interpretatively to make him no God. To fancy him a liar, is to fancy him no God: It is to put upon him the character of the devil, who is called *the father of lies* (g). The truth is, it is the greatest affront that can be offered to the majesty of God, and such as even mean men would scorn to put up at your hand.

Use 3. For terror to wicked sinners. God hath denounced dreadful and terrible judgments, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, against all impenitent and incorrigible sinners. He hath threatened to *wound the head of his enemies; and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses* (h). He hath threatened indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil: That *whoremongers and adulterers he will judge*: And, that upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest (i). O, the terrible wrath and vengeance that God hath denounced against such of you as live and go on in the allowed practice of any known iniquity! And remember, that he is *the God of truth*; true in his threatenings, as well as in his promises. How may the consideration of this make your hearts to tremble? Divine threatenings are a flying roll against you. Can you think that God will break his word? No, no; he can as soon cease to be God. You who do not regard divine threatenings, shall at last feel what now you will not believe.

Use 4. For comfort, to believers in Christ. There are many great and precious promises God hath made to you; promises of all kind of blessings you can stand in need of; promises suitable to all cases and conditions, and to all your various wants and exigencies; and you have an undoubted right to and interest in them all. Now, here is your comfort, he is the God of truth who hath promised; so that *the promises are all yea and amen in Christ* (k). He is true and faithful, and will not break his word to you. Yea, though you do often break your word to him, yet he will not break to you; blessed be he. This is his promise, *If his children forsake my law, &c. Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and*
their

(g) John viii. 44. (h) Psal. lxxviii. 21. (i) Rom. ii. 8, 9. Heb. xiii. 4. Psal. xi. 6. (k) 2 Cor. i. 20.

their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take away, &c. My covenant will I not break; nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips (l). God hath added his solemn oath to his promise, that by these two immutable things, in which it is impossible for him to lie, you may have strong consolation who have fled to Christ for refuge (m). God hath sworn, and will not repent. He hath given you not only his word, but his writ and oath, and hath sealed his covenant; and you have many experiences of his truth and faithfulness: All which are designed to assure you that he will be as good as his word. O, how comfortable is this, at all times, and in all cases? Particularly, 1. When you are in fears of being cast off and forsaken. Remember that the God of truth hath said, *he will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*; and that *he will never depart from thee to do thee good* (n). And hath he said it, and will he not make it good? 2. When you are in fears of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. You have such wicked and naughty hearts within, and there are so many snares and temptations without, that many times you are afraid you shall perish, and never arrive safe in glory. But the God of truth hath passed his word, that if you *believe on Christ*, you *shall not perish, but have everlasting life*. He hath promised to *help thee, and strengthen thee, and uphold thee with the right hand of his righteousness*: That he will *keep thee by his power, and preserve thee unto his heavenly kingdom* (o). In all these promises his truth and faithfulness are laid in pawn. 3. When you are in fears what shall become of the church of God. Remember that he stands engaged by many promises for the church's preservation. He hath promised to his church an indissoluble marriage that shall never end in widowhood. He hath promised to *keep his vineyard, to water it every moment, and keep it night and day*: That *the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*: That he will *make kings her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers*: That his Zion shall be a *burdensome stone for all people* (p). And he is the God of truth who hath promised all this: So that the truth of God must fail, before the church can be forsaken, or left to the will of of her enemies.

Use 5. For exhortation, to several duties.

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(l) Psal. lxxxix. 30,—34. (m) Heb. vi. 18. (n) Heb. xiii. 5. Jer. xxxii. 40. (o) John iii. 16. Isa. xli. 10. 1 Pet. i. 5. 2 Tim. iv. 18. (p) Hof. ii. 19. Isa. xxvii. 3. Matth. xvi. 18. Isa. xlix. 23. Zech. xii. 3.

1. Labour to be firmly persuaded of the truth of God ; that he is the God of truth. Ponder what I have already said, in opening up the doctrine, for the confirmation of your faith in this matter. Study the nature of God, and his glorious perfections, these especially that are the grounds on which his truth and faithfulness are built. And compare what God hath said with what he hath done ; his promises with his blessings, his threatenings with his judgments, and his predictions with the event. And be much in prayer, that God himself would persuade you.

2. Believe the truth of what God hath revealed in his written word. The author of it is the God of truth. The apostle *believed all things that are written in the law and the prophets* (q) : And for the same reason we ought to believe all things that are written in the Old and New Testament ; for the whole is his word : We have as good reason to believe all things, as to believe any thing that is there. Particularly, 1. Believe the doctrines of the word, and especially the doctrines of the gospel. Submit your reason to divine revelation. The great work of grace is to captivate the pride of our thoughts and carnal reason (r). 2. Believe the histories of the word. This is the more necessary, because your belief of the doctrinal part of the holy scriptures depends much upon this ; and the historical part is designed for our instruction, caution and warning. Hence the apostle says of the judgments that came on the Israelites, *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples ; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come* (s). 3. Believe the commands. *I have believed thy commandments* (t), says the Psalmist. Believe that the commands you have in the holy scriptures are the commands of God, and receive them with a due reverence of his majesty. Believe that all his commands are holy, just, and good ; and that they bind you indispensibly to obedience. Own the authority of God in every command, and urge it upon your own heart. 4. Believe the threatenings ; and believe them so, as to take warning from them ; so as to tremble at them ; and so as to be humbled and awakened to repentance and faith in Christ, that you may escape threatened wrath. 5. Believe the promises. Believe that they shall have a sure accomplishment, notwithstanding of present appearances and likelihoods to the contrary, and though providence seem to contradict the

(q) Acts xxiv. 14. (r) 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. (s) 1 Cor. x. 11.
(t) Psal. cxix. 66.

the promise: As Abraham and Sarah did. He believed that what God had promised he was able also to perform: And she judged him faithful who had promised (u).

Thus believe all things that are written in the holy scriptures. For this end, consider who it is that speaks in them: It is the God of truth, who cannot lie: Diligently attend the means by which God useth to work and strengthen faith; especially the preaching of the word: Check these vile thoughts of Atheism and unbelief that are apt to arise in your hearts: And be earnest to feel the power of the word in your own hearts, and to have it becoming a word of truth unto you. Nothing will more confirm your faith in the belief of scripture truths, than your own experience of the power and sweetness of them: Then you have a witness to the truth in your own bosom; for, *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself* (x).

3. Venture on the blessed word of God. He is the God of truth: Therefore his word is a sure ground of faith. It is the word of him that cannot lie, so that you may safely venture your immortal souls on this bottom.

4. Have a special regard to the truth, as it is revealed in the word of God. And,

(1.) Study to know the truth, and to grow in the knowledge of it, and to be firmly persuaded of it. For this end, enquire into the grounds and reasons of it, that you may receive it upon solid conviction of the excellency thereof; and that you may take up the way of truth, not by chance, but by choice, and be able to say, *I have chosen the way of truth* (y). Truth will have the greater force upon your heart, when you see the grounds and reasons of it †.

(2.) Obey the truth. Obey, from the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered you (z). Let the truth rule and govern your hearts and lives. Study to live up to it, and walk in it. This will be matter of joy to such as fear and love God, as it was to the apostle: *I rejoiced greatly, says he, when I found of thy children walking in truth*; and, *I have no greater joy than*

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(u) Rom. iv. 21. Heb. xi. 11. (x) 1 John v. 10. (y) Psal cxix. 30.

† The inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it; the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it; and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature. *Lord Bacon, Essay 1.*

It is heaven upon earth, to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth. *L. Bacon, U. S.*

(z) Rom. vi. 17.

to bear that my children walk in truth (a). Take heed that through your miscarriages the way of truth be not evil spoken of. Truth is more pleasant in the use and practice, than in knowledge and contemplation.

(3.) Keep the truth pure and entire. 1. Keep it entire. Hold it fast, and quit not one hoof of it. *Hold fast the form of sound words—Hold fast the faithful word—Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast (b).* Though devils and men muster up all their force to pull the truth from you, yet hold it fast, and let it not go. 2. Keep it pure. Do not suffer the truth to be debased by unworthy mixtures, no not for peace with men. Endeavour to maintain and preserve the purity of doctrine and worship. There ought to be no accommodation with men to the prejudice of the truth; lest, while we go about to make peace with men, we make a breach with God. I say then, keep the truth pure and entire: and be earnest both with God and men, that it be not injured by a promiscuous toleration.

(4.) Bear witness unto the truth. In this you are called to imitate Christ as your pattern: *To this end was I born, says he, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth (c).* Bear witness unto the truth, by professing and confessing it, owning and adhering to it, on all hazards. *Let us hold fast our profession; and, let us hold it fast without wavering (d).* Do not dissemble your respect to the truth, either for fear or shame. And bear witness unto the truth, by suffering for it, when called thereunto, sealing your testimony with your blood. This honours the truth: For the world will be convinced thereby of the weight of the truths which you profess.

5. Let me exhort you especially, who are the children of God, to trust God upon his word. Truth is a great ground of trust; we trust men of truth: and will you not much more trust the God of truth. Trust in him, and depend on him, through Christ, for the accomplishment of his promises†. Rest and rely upon his truth and faithfulness. In the promises God hath laid his truth in pawn with you, and hath thereby given you a right and claim to the blessings promised: And none that depended on his word were ever disappointed; for *the word of the Lord is tried (e).* Well then, believe the truth of the

(a) 2 John 4. 3 John 4. (b) 2 Tim. i. 13. Tit. i. 9. Rev. iii. 3.
(c) John xviii 37. (d) Heb. iv. 14. and x 23.

† *Promissa tua sunt; quis falli timeat, cum promittit veritas.*

(e) Psal xviii. 30.

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the promises, as I already exhorted you. Let the promises be dear and precious to you, as they were to these ancient worthies, of whom it is said, that *having seen the promises afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them* (f). They hugged the promises, as it were; O precious promises! Flee to Christ in the promises, and rest on him for the blessings promised, and hope for the accomplishment, though contrary to present appearances and likelihoods, as Abraham did, who *against hope believed in hope* (g).

6. Praise God for his truth, as the psalmist doth, in my text, and the verse preceding; *I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people; and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations: For thy mercy is great above the heavens; and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds: And elsewhere, I will praise thy name, for thy loving-kindness, and for thy truth* (h). We use to praise and commend men of truth; and shall we not much more praise the God of truth. O, sing forth the honour of his name, and make his praise glorious. You cannot praise God so much as he deserves; for, *who can shew forth all his praise; and he is exalted above all blessing and praise* (i). Yet you should praise him as much as you can, and call in the help of others, because you cannot do it sufficiently, as the psalmist doth: *O praise the Lord, all ye nations: Praise him, all ye people: For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever: Praise ye the Lord* (k).

7. Give God the glory of his truth and faithfulness before the world. Glorify him, not only by the quiet and content of your own hearts, but by your carriage before others. You should not only believe, but *set to your seal that God is true* (l). Seal the truth of God as his witnesses, by your joyfulness in all conditions, your patience in afflictions, your diligence in holiness, and your hope in God in the most desperate-like cases. Sanctify God in the eyes of other men; and let the world see that you can venture on the credit of God's word (m).

8. Is he the true God, the God of truth? Study to be like him in this: to be true, as he is true. Pythagoras, a Heathen philosopher, being asked, *What made men like God?* answered, *when they spake truth*. Magistrates and judges should be men of truth, that therein they may resemble God whose name they bear (n); and so should all private Christians. And,

(1.) Be true to God. 1. In performing your vows and promises

(f) Heb. xi. 13. (g) Rom. iv. 18. (h) Psal. cxxxviii. 2.
(i) Psal. cvi. 2. Neh. ix. 5. (k) Psal. cxvii. 1, 2. (l) John iii. 33.
(m) See Numb. xx. 12. (n) Exod. xviii. 21.

mises to him. Having vowed to the Lord, and *bound your souls with a bond, do not break your word. Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.* Say with Jephtha, *I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back (o).* O be true, and keep your word to God. Perform what you have vowed. Having listed yourselves soldiers under Christ's banner, and sworn to him, see that you be true to him, and do not turn your back on him, and his cause and gospel, in a day of trial. Run not into the camp of his enemies. 2. With respect to the trust he hath committed to you. Time, health, wealth, power and authority, ordinances and means of grace, opportunities of doing good, gifts and endowments of body and mind, the graces of the Spirit in you, are a trust committed to you, talents to be employed for the glory of God, and your own and others good. Be true to your trust. Be faithful to God. Be not like the unfaithful and slothful servant, what *hid his lord's talent (p).* God keeps an exact account what talents are entrusted to you, and how they are employed; what you have received, and what is returned: and a day of reckoning will come, when he will say, *Give an account of thy stewardship (q).* 3. By being sincere and upright in the practice of religion. *Walk before God in truth: and serve him in sincerity and truth.* Be true in all your duties: *Draw near with a true heart (r).* Let there be no ground for such a complaint as that against you, *Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit (s).* Take heed of lying to and dissembling with God in duty. Study to be *Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile (t):* and be able to appeal to God for the sincerity and truth of your heart; as Peter, *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee (u).*

(2.) Be true to men. Keep your promises, though to your loss. Though you *swear to your own hurt, yet change not (x),* and speak nothing but truth in your ordinary communication, as the apostle exhorts: *Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour (y).* It is one of the characters of an heir of glory, that *he speaketh the truth in his heart (z).* And liars are ranked among those that go to hell: *Murderers, and whoremongers, &c. and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (a).* And they are excluded out of heaven. *For without are dogs, and forcerers, &c.*
and

(o) Numb. xxx. 2. Psal lxxvi. 11. Judges xi. 35. (p) Matth. xxvi. 18, 26. (q) Luke xvi. 2. (r) Isa. xxxviii. 3. Josu. xxiv. 14. Heb. x. 22. (s) Hos. xi. 12. (t) John i. 47. (u) John xxi. 15. (x) Psal. xv. 4. (y) Eph. iv. 25. (z) Psal. xv. 2. (a) Rev. xxi. 8.

and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie (b). Alas, lying is become a very common sin in this generation. In case of faults committed in buying and selling, O what lying is there? But it is a vile sin. It is most contrary to God, who is the God of truth: It conforms men to the devil, who is the father of lies: and it is destructive of human society; for there can be no trust, where there is no truth. Hence it is reckoned such a disgrace, and such an odious charge to give a man the lie; and one * gives this reason for it: "If it be well weighed," says he, "to say that a man lieth, is as much as to say, that he is "brave towards God, and a coward towards men." And a learned prelate says †, "He that tells a lie out of fear, is at "once bold towards God, and base towards men."

Thus, study to be like God, in being men of truth. This will be your glory and happiness. Likeness draws love, and makes way for communion. When God sees his own image stamped on you, this will draw out his heart toward you.

(b) Rev. xxii. 15.

* Mountaigne's Essay.

† Tillotson, Sermon on Deut. xxxii. 4.

DISCOURSE XIII.

Of God's Eternity.

SERMON LIV.

Job. xxxvi. 26.—*Neither can the number of his years be searched out.*

IN the first part of this verse, Elihu asserts God's incomprehensible greatness; and then he gives instance of this in the eternity of his duration, in the words read. Years are attributed to God after the manner of men. They are only proper to men and things of time. Our lives are measured by days and years. But the great God is above all such rule and measure of life: There is no measuring of his duration by days and years. Yet we express it so, for our understanding. Elihu speaks here of God's eternity, in such terms as are suited to our capacity, *Neither can the number of his years be searched out.* The word in the Original doth properly signify, *to search a thing thoroughly, and to the bottom* †. So that these words

† Caryl. in Loc.

words are, according to our apprehension and understanding, a description of God's eternity. The Holy Ghost, to give us some notion of an infinite and eternal duration, expresseth himself by such a resemblance as is suited to the capacities of men. We may easily number the days and years of the oldest man that ever lived: But what shall we say of him, to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night (a)? Yea, there being no proportion at all between time and eternity, what shall we say of him, in comparison of whose duration, ten thousand millions of imaginable ages are as nothing.

We may take the doctrine thus:

God is infinite and incomprehensible in his duration.

That is, he is eternal. His duration is far above our reach and capacity. I shall here endeavour to shew,

1. *What eternity is.*
2. *That it is an excellency belonging to the supreme Being, and to him alone.*
3. *How God is eternal.*
4. *What discoveries be hath given of the eternity of his Being.*
5. *That he is incomparable in his eternity.*
6. *I shall apply the doctrine.*

First. What eternity is. The notion of eternity is very difficult: It is hardly understood, and more hardly expressed. Indeed, it is not easy to discourse on this subject intelligibly to those of mean capacities, such as many hearers are. Yet I shall endeavour to be plain. It is easy to comprehend, that there is an eternity; but what it is, cannot be comprehended. It is better expressed by negative than by positive words. So, when we say, that eternity is without beginning, succession, and ending, we express rather what it is not, than what it is. As we understand it, eternity is an infinite and immutable duration. 1. I say, it is an infinite duration; which hath neither beginning nor ending. Eternity never begins, and never ceases. It comprehends in itself all imaginable years and ages. It cannot be measured; and can neither be augmented, nor diminished. 2. It is an immutable duration; a permanent and immutable state. There is no succession in eternity, as there is in time. It is a fixed *now*.

(a) Psal. xc. 4.

Secondly,

Secondly, Eternity is an excellency belonging to the supreme Being, and to him alone. Hence he is called *the eternal God* (b); *the King eternal* (c); and *the everlasting God* (d): And he is said to *inhabit eternity* (e): And his eternity is thus expressed, *I am Alpha and Omega* (f). These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet: And so the meaning follows, *The beginning and the ending*. He was before the world, and shall continue to exist when the world shall come to an end. In this sense he is called *the First and the Last* (g). God's eternity is sometimes expressed by parts; by the differences of time, past, present, and to come: As in that text, *The Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come*; and that, *Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come* (h). It is as significant an expression of God's eternity as can be suited to our capacities. † It might always be said of God; *he was*; and it may always be said of him, *he will be*. God always is what he was, and always will be what he is. His eternity comprehends in it all times, past, present, and to come; not formally, and successively; but eminently, and at once. So that this expression, *who was, and is, and is to come*, interprets the name JEHOVAH, and is a paraphrase upon it; according to some, who observe * that the name JEHOVAH comprehends these three; JE, the future time; HO, the time present; and VAH, the time past: And the French, wherever they meet with the name JEHOVAH in scripture, which we commonly translate, *the Lord*, render it, *the Eternal*.

We see then, how God's eternity is expressed and asserted in scripture. And he must needs be eternal: For, 1. This is consonant to the notion of God as the first cause. Either God must be eternal, or nothing could have had a being in time. We must always come at last to some first cause, who hath his

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(b) Deut. xxiii. 27. (c) 1 Tim. i. 17. (d) Gen. xxi. 33. Rom. xvi. 26. (e) Isa. lvii. 15. (f) Rev. i. 8. (g) Isa. xlv. 6. Rev. xxii. 13. (h) Rev. i. 8. and iv. 8.

† *Quamvis natura illa immutabilis, & ineffabilis, non recipiat, fuit, vel erit, sed tantum est; tamen propter mutabilitatem temporum, in quibus, versatur nostra mortalitas & mutabilitas, non mendaciter dicimus, est, fuit, & erit. Fuit, in præteritis sæculis, est in præsentibus, erit in futuris: Fuit, quia nunquam defuit; erit quia nunquam deerit; est, quia semper est.*

Aug. Tract. 9. in Joan.

* Mast. Theol. Theoret. Pract. L. 2. C. 4. § 8.

being in and of himself, and gave a being to all other things; and the first cause must necessarily exist from eternity. 2. If God were not eternal, he could not be infinitely perfect: For, finite duration is inconsistent with infinite perfection. Hence we may observe that God's eternity diffuseth itself through all his attributes. His power is eternal: We read of *his eternal power and Godhead*; and it is said, *In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength* (i). His knowledge is eternal: For, he doth not know things successively, as we do; but at once, by one simple and eternal act of intuition: *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (k). His goodness is eternal: It endures continually. His mercy is eternal. It endures for ever, and is from everlasting to everlasting. And his truth is eternal: It endures for ever, and to all generations (l). So that God's eternity is the gloss and lustre of all his other perfections. Every perfection would be imperfect, if it were not eternal. 3. Even the heathens owned and asserted the eternity of God. Aristotle * makes eternity essential to the divine nature: Thales being asked, what God is, answered, † *One that hath neither beginning nor ending*. The poets usually gave him the title of *Immortal* ‡. And the oath most usual among the heathens, was in this form §, *I appeal to the immortal gods*. Yea, the Epicureans || usually described God to be *that blessed and eternal Being*. Lucretius gives this account of the divine nature ¶, *that it enjoys perfect and eternal peace*: And Cicero says, †† *It is impossible for us to conceive of God but as being eternal*.

Thirdly, I am next to shew, how God is eternal; or, what is his eternity. God's eternity is the duration of his essence. It comprehends all times, all durations, and infinitely excels them all. It is a negative attribute, and is a denying of God any measure of time. When we call him eternal, we thereby remove from him all possibility of beginning and ending, and of succession and change.

1. He is without beginning. So the psalmist speaks: *Before*

(i) Rom. i. 20. Isa. xxv. 4. (k) Acts xv. 18. (l) Psal. lii. 1: cxxxvi. ciii. 17. cxvii. 2. and c. 5.

* De Cælo. L. 2.

† 'Ο μὴτ' ἀρχὴν ἔχων, μήτε τέλος. Thales apud Laertium.

‡ Ἀθάνατος.

§ Deos testor immortales. || Cic. de Nat. Deor. L. 1.

¶ Omnis, enim per se divum natura necesse est.

Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur.

†† Nos Deum nisi sempiternum intelligere qui possumus?

fore the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world; even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (m). He was before the world, and consequently from everlasting. His throne is established of old; he is from everlasting. And it is said, that Abraham called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God (n). Where the Lord is opposed to the gods of the nations; they were but of yesterday, new upstart gods; but the true and living God is from everlasting. Hence he is called the Ancient of Days (o). He was before all time; before the beginning of time; and before that, there could be nothing but eternity.

2. He is without end. As he is from everlasting, so he is to everlasting, God: And his years shall have no end. He can never cease to be. He endures for ever; and lives for ever and ever (p). As he had an infinite and incomprehensible Being before the world was made; so he will remain the same still, when the world shall be no more. So that in viewing the majesty of God, the soul is inclosed between two eternities, between infiniteness before, and infiniteness behind. What way soever it turn and look, it sees infiniteness round about it.

3. He is without succession or change. † Eternity is a present existence, wherein and whereunto nothing is past or future, it being always wholly present in and to itself: So that there is no succession in eternity. Therefore, God being eternal, is without succession or change in his duration; as these words of the psalmist import: *Thou shalt endure* (q); or, as it may be rendered, thou standest, or abidest, or changeest not. And this is expressed also in the next verse: *Thou art the same*. The being of God is not successive, as ours is, but permanent: He always remains the same in being: *With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. His years do not fail (r). His years do not come and go, as ours do. There is not this day, tomorrow, or yesterday, with him. He dwells in one indivisible point of eternity; and is what he is in one infinite moment of being.

(m) Psal. xc. 2. (n) Psal. xciii. 2. Gen. xxi. 33. (o) Dan. vii. 9. (p) Psal. xc. 2. cii. 27. and ix. 7. Rev. x. 6. (q) Psal. cii. 26. (r) James i. 17. Heb. i. 12.

† *In eternitate Dei nihil est præteritum, quasi jam non sit; nihil futurum, quasi nondum sit. Non est ibi nisi est, non ibi fuit, aut erit: Quia & quod fuit, jam non est; et quod erit, nondum est; et quicquid ibi est, non nisi est.* Aug. in Psal. ci.

Deo nihil præteriti, nihil futuri, absq; blasphemia tribui potest.

Plato in Timæo.

being. Hence, he is said *to inhabit eternity*. And his name is, *I AM(s)*; not *I was*, or *shall be*. Being in the present time, it shews that his essence knows not past and future. *I AM*, always and immutably the same; an unbounded ocean of being.

Thus I have shewed you, how God is eternal, according as we understand it. But O, who can find it out? How little do we know of God's eternity? Whose understanding would it not confound? When we search here, we soon lose ourselves in an infiniteness round about us.

Fourthly, Let us see what discoveries God hath given of the eternity of his being. God shews himself to be eternal by these three things especially.

1. By giving to men immortal souls, that shall live for evermore. When the body returns to the dust, the soul still liveth, and *returns unto God who gave it (t)*. It hath in it no principle of corruption; and it cannot be killed or destroyed by any created being. Now, he that gives immortality, must needs himself be immortal; for nothing can give what it hath not: So that the soul, considered as immortal, is an evidence and effect of God's eternity.

2. In our redemption by Christ. The original moving cause thereof was the love of God: *For, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, &c (u)*. And his love is everlasting: *I have loved thee*, says the Lord, *with an everlasting love (x)*. Again, it was from everlasting, before the world was made, that the business of our redemption was transacted between the Father and Christ. *I was set up*, says Christ, *from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was (y)*. And the apostle tells us, that believers are called by God according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began (z). And the redemption purchased by Christ is eternal: *He obtained eternal redemption for us (a)*. It is of an eternal value, virtue, and efficacy. And the comfort of it is called *everlasting consolation (b)*: It is a comfort that endures to all eternity.

3. In the rewards and punishments he hath appointed. It was from everlasting that God purposed to give heaven and salvation to his people. Heaven is a *kingdom prepared for them*, in God's decree and purpose, *from the foundation of the world (c)*.
And

(s) Isa. lvii. 15. Exod. iii. 14. (t) Eccl. xii. 7. (u) John iii. 16. (x) Jer. xxxi. 4. (y) Prov. viii. 23. (z) 2 Tim i. 9. (a) Heb. ix. 12. (b) 2 Thess. ii. 16. (c) 2 Tim. i. 9. Tit. i. 2. Matth. xxv. 34.

And this glorious reward is itself eternal. The kingdom is an *everlasting kingdom*: The crown, *a crown of glory that fadeth not away*: The inheritance, *incorruptible, and that fadeth not away*: The life is *eternal*: And the pleasures of heaven, are *pleasures evermore* (d). So also it was from everlasting that God designed hell's torments for the wicked and ungodly, they being *before of old ordained to condemnation*. And the punishment itself is *everlasting* (e). There is an eternity of torment, as well as an eternity of joy. In hell, *their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched* (f). Such eternal rewards and punishments are suitable to the eternal majesty of the Lawgiver.

Fifthly, Let me shew, that God is incomparable in his eternity. O what a vast difference there is between him and us in duration! *Mine age is as nothing before thee*, says the psalmist: And says Job, *Are thy days as the days of man? Are thy years as man's days* (g)? No, no: Man's days begin, succeed, and end; but not God's: His years are throughout all generations; and his years *shall have no end* (h). Angels and the souls of men are immortal; they shall abide and live for evermore; and so are eternal *a parte post*, as they speak in the schools: But they are not eternal as God is. For,

1. He is originally eternal. Any eternity that angels and souls of men have, is communicated to them by God; so that they have it only by derivation: But God hath his eternity originally in and from himself. He is not eternal by grant, or by the disposal of any other. In this sense, he *only hath immortality* (i).

2. He is independently eternal. Angels and the souls of men depend on God every moment for their immortal beings. Hence he is called *the God of the spirits of all flesh* (k). So that theirs is but a dependent eternity: But God is wholly independent.

3. He is absolutely and perfectly eternal. Though angels and the souls of men shall live for ever; yet the time was when they had no being, but lay in the womb of Nothing: We are but of yesterday; poor new upstarts; so that ours is but a half eternity, an eternity without end. But God is absolutely and fully eternal, without beginning, succession, and ending.

4. He is necessarily eternal. Angels and the souls of men
are

(d) 2 Pet. i. 11. and v. 4. 1 Pet. i. 4. Tit. i. 2. Psal. xvi. 11.
(e) Jude 4. Matth. xxv. 46. (f) Mark ix 44. (g) Psal. xxxix 5. Job
x 5. (h) Psal. cii. 24, 27. (i) 1 Tim. i. 16. (k) Numb. xvi. 22.

are immortal, only by God's grant and appointment. They are subject to return to nothing, at God's pleasure; and would certainly return to nothing, if he should suspend the preserving influence of his providence. But God's eternity is necessary, and from his own nature: As he doth necessarily exist, so he doth necessarily exist always.

5. He is essentially eternal; he is so by nature and essence. Though angels and the souls of men be immortal; yet such a duration is not essential to them, but accidental, depending upon the will and pleasure of God: But God is eternal by his own essence. Yea, his eternity is his very essence; he is his own eternity; he is eternity itself: *The strength of Israel* (1); or, as others render the word, *the eternity of Israel*. God's eternity is nothing else but his duration; and his duration is nothing else but his existence enduring.

From what is said, it plainly appears that God is incomprehensible in his duration; because it is infinite and eternal, and what is infinite and eternal cannot be comprehended by finite and temporary creatures.

✓ O how little do we know of God's eternity! We cannot fully conceive it, much less express it. The most soaring finite understanding cannot have a proportionable knowledge of it. There is no proportion between the longest duration of time and eternity. There are now near six thousand years since the beginning of time: But what are all these years, but as a moment, yea, as nothing, in comparison of eternity? Yea, suppose all angels and men had been constantly employed, each one by himself, from their creation till now, in summing up as many thousands and millions of imaginable years and ages as possibly they could; and suppose a product to be made of all these years and ages: Yet all this vast and marvellous arithmetic would amount at most but to a faint shadow of God's eternity. O eternity, eternity! Here is neither bank nor bottom. There is no way here, but to flee into thy sanctuary, *O the height, and the depth!* O who can fathom the depth of eternity! We know that God is eternal: But eternity itself is too great to be measured by the short line of any created understanding.

S E R M O N LV.

Sixthly, I Proceed to the application.

Use 1. For instruction or information. Several things may be inferred from God's eternity.

Instr. 1.

(1) 1 Sam. xv. 29.

Instr.
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ject to
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eternal.
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Instr. 1. Is God eternal? Then he is immutable and unchangeable. It is contrary to the nature of eternity to be subject to change. If God should either begin to be what he was not, or cease to be what he was, it is plain he were not eternal. Therefore his immutability is inferred from his name JEHOVAH, which implies his eternity: *I am the Lord (a)*, says he, I am JEHOVAH, he who was, and is, and is to come; therefore, *I change not*. All things that are changed, do either cease to be what they were, or begin to be what they were not: But God is what he is, in one point of eternity, without any succession; so that there can be no change in him. We see then, that God's eternity excludes all kind of mutability. If God should suffer any change, he would either acquire something which he had not before, and so something in him would have a beginning; or, he would lose something which he had before, and so something in him would have an end: So that in either of these cases, he would not be wholly eternal and everlasting.

Instr. 2. Is God eternal? Then he is infinitely blessed and happy. For, seeing he is eternal, nothing can be added to him, nothing detracted from him: So that he is the most blessed Being, *blessed from everlasting to everlasting (b)*. Being eternal, he cannot acquire any perfection which he had not before, nor lose any perfection which formerly he possessed; so that, from everlasting to everlasting he is the most excellent Being, infinitely and perfectly blessed in and of himself. Being eternal, he hath all that ever he had or can have, all at once; nothing of his blessedness is either to come to him, or gone from him, but all is present with him. O then, how infinitely blessed and happy must he be!

Instr. 3. Is God eternal? Then time is at his disposal. He that inhabits eternity, must needs be Lord of time. He made time, and therefore must have the ordering and disposal of it. 1. He disposes and orders the duration of time, how long it shall last. He hath set a period to it, and determined when time shall be no more. And as to particular persons, he hath determined the days and years of every man and woman, by an irrevocable decree. *His days are determined*, says Job; *the number of his months are with thee; thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass (c)*. 2. He disposes and orders all the changes of time, whether joyous or grievous, prosperous or adverse. And what changes can he not make in a little time? What great revolutions can he bring about

(a) Mal. iii. 6.

(b) Psal. xli. 13.

(c) Job xiv. 5.

about in a few years, yea, in a few months or days? Whereof our own times are a witness. *He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings (d).* Both these seem to be aimed at in that expression of the psalmist, *My times are in thy hand (e).* Our times are in his hand, to shorten or lengthen them out at his pleasure; and to change them from prosperity to adversity, or from adversity to prosperity, as it pleaseth him.

Use 2. For terror to wicked sinners.

1. If God be eternal, then sins long since committed are always present before him. Your old sins may be forgotten by you, but they cannot be forgotten by an eternal Being. In regard of his eternity, former years are no more distant from him than the present year. Time cannot raze out that which hath been known from eternity. O what matter of terror is here to such of you as have lived in sin all your days? All the sins you have been guilty of from the womb till now, are as fresh in God's remembrance, as if they were committed this moment. He cannot forget them; and he hath bound himself by oath never to forget them, if you refuse to part with them. *The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely, I will never forget any of their works (f).*

2. If God be eternal, then he lives for ever to be avenged on all obstinate and impenitent sinners. God hath laid his eternity in pawn for your punishment, who will still go on in your trespasses: *For I lift up my hand to heaven, says he, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and I will reward them that hate me. O, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (g).* God's eternity is matter of terror to all that hate him, and walk contrary to him: He lives for ever to avenge his quarrel against them. *He is the living God, and an everlasting King; at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation (h).* It is the misery of obstinate sinners in the very perfection of it, that an eternal God is to take vengeance on them for ever: *They shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (i).* Because God is eternal, therefore the torments of the damned are so also. The eternity of God makes the torments of hell more dreadful than his power doth; for, his eternity is that which renders these torments

(d) Dan. ii. 21.

(e) Psal. xxxi. 15.

(f) Amos viii. 7.

(g) Deut. xxxii. 40, 41. Heb. x. 31 (h) Jer. x. 10. (i) 2 Thess. i. 9.

torments perpetual, and the perpetuity of them does greatly aggravate them. All this is matter of terror to such as are out of Christ, and will not part with their sins. On that great day, the thoughts of God's eternity will make the hearts of impenitent unbelieving sinners to tremble.

Use 3. For comfort to believers in Christ. O how comfortable is it, that this eternal God is your God, yours in all that he is and hath? He is an eternal good and possession to them whose God he is. Earthly enjoyments and comforts are but perishing things, so that they are miserable who have their portion in these: But O, how happy are ye in the enjoyment of him whose years cannot be searched out! It is that God who hath neither beginning nor ending, that is your God; and your interest in him abides firm. He is from everlasting to everlasting God; and so long as he is God, he will be your God: *For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death (k).* He is your God, not for a year, or an age; yea, not for millions of years or ages only; but *for ever and ever.* Hence it is that he makes over himself to you in the covenant of grace under the notion of the eternal God: *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms (l).* He is the eternal God; and so long as he is God, he will be a never-failing spring of joy and peace to your soul. He will be your God, while he hath any being; and when all earthly comforts fail you, he will be your abiding portion. *My flesh and my heart faileth, says the psalmist, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever (m).* Yea, even when you are dead, he will be your God still; as he is *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, now some thousands of years after these patriarchs are dead. And he will be your God to all eternity. In heaven you shall fully reap the blessed fruits and advantages of a covenant interest in God. Hence it is said, *And God himself shall be with them, and be their God: And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Then shall you be ever with the Lord (n).* Your happiness in the enjoyment of him will be eternal. O, how comfortable is this! What a blessedness is it to have a saving interest in an eternal God!

Again, here is ground of comfort to believers, with respect to the church. The stability of the church is built upon God's eternity: *Thou art the same, says the psalmist, and thy years shall have no end.* And hence he infers, *The children of thy ser-*

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LII

vants

(k) Psal. xlviii. 14. (l) Deut. xxxiii. 27. (m) Psal. lxxiii. 26.
(n) Rev. xxi. 3, 4. 1 Theff. iv. 17.

wants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee (o). God's eternity is matter of comfort in the deepest distresses of the church. Therefore God's abiding for ever is what Jeremiah pleads with God in the behalf of the church: *Thou, O Lord, says he, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation unto generation: Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time (p)?* And the prophet Habakkuk, *Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy One? We shall not die (q).* It is not agreeable to God's eternity to forget his church, seeing he hath from eternity borne a good will to her. It is very comfortable that Zion's God sits on an eternal throne. *The Lord reigneth, says the psalmist. Thy throne is established of old: Thou art from everlasting. And, the Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations (r).* Therefore in the greatest confusions, and in the greatest dangers that threaten the church, let your eyes be fixed on God's eternity. What need we fear the church's enemies? They may flourish for a little time, but shall soon be cut down, and destroyed for ever. *But Zion's God is most high for evermore (s).* He hath engaged by promise, to preserve, deliver, and establish his church; and he lives for ever to make good his word. This is a great antidote against fear; and is proposed to the apostle John as such; *Fear not, I am the first and the last (t).* He is eternal, the first and the last. Therefore, he shall have the last word, and the last blow; and shall carry on his designs for the good of his church, and master all difficulties, in spite of devils and wicked men.

Use 4. For exhortation. In several branches.

Exhort. 1. Let us reverence and adore this eternal God. We are commanded, to *rise up before the hoary head, and to honour the face of the old man (u).* And one reason of this law may be, because aged men are some dark shadow and resemblance of God's eternity. Therefore, if we ought to honour them, how much more ought we to honour, reverence, and adore the *Ancient of days (x)?* What are the oldest men in comparison of the eternal God? All their days and years, yea, all the minutes of their lives are soon numbered; but *the number of his years cannot be searched out.* Therefore let the consideration of God's eternity raise in you high adoring thoughts of him. We read that *the four and twenty elders fell down, and worshipped him*

(o) Psal. cii. 27, 28. (p) Lam. v. 19, 20. (q) Hab. i. 12.
 (r) Psal. xciii. 1, 2. and cxlvi. 10. (s) Psal. xcii. 7, 8. (t) Rev.
 i. 17. (u) Lev. xix. 32. (x) Dan. vii. 9.

him that liveth for ever and ever (y). We cannot have adequate conceptions of God's eternity: but let us adore what we cannot comprehend.

Exhort 2. Get an interest in this eternal God as your God and portion, and seek all your happiness in the enjoyment of him alone. You are often forecasting how it shall fare with you and yours, as to your and their outward and worldly condition; and in providing for yourselves and your families, you have a regard not only to the time present, but to the time to come: but to provide for time only, and cast off all thoughts of eternity, is a disgrace to your nature. You may have a wealthy portion of the good things of this life, and yet be miserable for evermore. Therefore, if you would be eternally happy, get the eternal God for your everlasting portion.

To quicken you to this, consider,

1. You are made for an eternal state. For God hath given you precious and immortal souls that shall live for evermore; and to an eternity they must go, and live as long as God lives. Do what you will, you cannot altogether put off the sense of this: For, as the word of God gives testimony to your eternal existence, so you have a witness in your own bosom that assures you of an after-reckoning.

2. Being made for eternity, earthly comforts and enjoyments cannot make you happy, nor yield you any solid satisfaction. Why, Because they are but fading and perishing things; *The fashion of this world passeth away (z)*. The beauties and glories of it are but transitory and fading things. *The crown of the pride of man, and his glorious beauty, is but a fading flower (a)*. And what joy, peace, or rest, can you take in such things as perish in the very use? Again, you and all your earthly comforts are ready to part every moment, and that for eternity, never more to meet again: So that these things cannot be a satisfying portion to you †. Things of a short duration are not proportioned to an immortal soul. The whole world could not make you happy, seeing you have souls that shall survive all the delights and enjoyments of it. Your immortal souls cannot be happy but in the enjoyment of an eternal good.

3. A saving interest in an eternal God will yield to your soul solid relief and satisfaction: And that, 1. Because he is an

(y) Rev. iv. 10. (z) 1 Cor. vii. 31. (a) Isa. xxviii. 1.

† *Mors iis terribilis est, quorum cum Vita omnia extinguuntur.*
Cic. Parad. 1.

an all-sufficient portion, that can supply all your wants, and answer all your necessities, and fill and satisfy all the capacities and desires of your immortal souls. To your happiness there needs no more but God. You will be compleatly happy in him alone. 2. Because he is a durable, yea, an eternal portion. When all other things perish, he abides a blessed and satisfying portion to a believing soul. When all other comforts are gone, yet God is not gone; he remains and abides for ever: And it will yield sweet relief to you against the perishing condition of all outward things, that you have all good treasured up in him. When once he is your God and portion, he is yours for ever. Your interest in him cannot be shaken or disturbed: For the covenant in which he makes over himself to you, is an everlasting covenant that cannot be made void and null. This was David's great ground of comfort: *Although my house be not so with God, says he, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant (b).*

Well then, renounce all earthly vanities, and make choice of this eternal God for your God and portion. And chuse him deliberately, and resolutely, in and through the Mediator Christ. And resign yourselves to him, to be wholly and eternally his.

Exhort. 3. Seeing he is the eternal God, let this engage you, who are believers in Christ, to trust in him, and depend on him for the accomplishment of his promises. God's eternity is a great ground of trust. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (c).* As his truth, so his power is eternal; they always have been, and will be to eternity, the same: So that, what he hath promised, he cannot fail to perform. Therefore, when his people despond, as if he had forgotten his promises, or are weary of doing good, he calls them to reflect on what they had heard of his eternity: *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary (d)?* His eternity is the assurance of his ability to make good his promises. Men may be sincere in making promises; yet death may soon put them out of all capacity to perform. But God cannot fail of making good his word, because he is *the Eternity of Israel*. So it is said, *The Strength of Israel (Orig. the Eternity of Israel) will not lie*

(b) 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. (c) Isa. xxvi. 4. (d) Isa. xl. 27, 28.

lie (e). The psalmist beats us off from trusting in men, because of their frailty and mortality; and infers the happiness of such as trust in God from his eternity: *Put not your trust in princes, says he, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God;—who keepeth truth for ever (f).* When men die, their purposes and promises die with them: But God lives for ever. Therefore trust in him, and depend on him through Christ for the performance of what he hath promised.

Exhort. 4. Let us improve the consideration of God's eternity,

1. To humble us. What are we but poor nothings, in comparison of *the Ancient of Days*? We are poor upstarts; we are but of yesterday, and possibly may not have a morrow: But the Lord is for ever and ever the same. What are we but dust and ashes, kneaded together in time; compacted dust, that shall ere long be dissolved? *What is our life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away (g).* And the psalmist cries out, *Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee (h).* What a nothing is our life, if compared with God's eternity? O then, how humble should we be before the eternal God!

2. To quicken us to repentance for sins long since committed. Many of you let light of sins committed many years ago, as if length of time could wipe out the guilt of them. But though they are past with you, yet in regard of God's eternity, they are always present before him. Seeing there is no succession in eternity, as there is in time; therefore sins committed many years ago, are before God as if they were committed but this moment: For, *a thousand years in his sight are but as yesterday when it is past; and as a watch in the night (i).* Therefore, consider your old sins in relation to God's eternity, that you may remember them, and grieve and mourn for them, as if they were but newly committed.

3. To lessen all other things in our esteem and affection. How base is it to prefer momentary vanities and pleasures before the everlasting God? What is this earth that men doat upon but a point, if compared with the whole fabric of the world? And it is but of a short standing; so that there can be
no

(e) 1 Sam. xv. 29. (f) Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4, 5, 6. (g) James iv. 14. (h) Psal. xxxix. 5. (i) Psal. xc. 4.

no comparison between it and the great eternal God. What are the things of the world but perishing and vanishing things? All the honours and delights of Pharaoh's court are called *the pleasures of sin for a season (k)*. The most shining glory of the world will shortly be extinguished; but the Lord is *from everlasting to everlasting God*. Therefore let all things be low and base in your eyes, as loss and dung, yea, as nothing, in comparison of him. Why will you doat upon a perishing glory, when there is an eternal being to ravish your heart?

4. For the support of our faith and hope. *The four beasts*, which, according to some interpreters, represent the Christian church, *rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come (l)*. Together with God's holiness, they mention his eternity. And his eternity is again repeated, verse 9th, — *These beasts give glory, and honour, and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever*. It is a great support to faith and hope, to take frequent views of God's eternity. His power, wisdom, goodness, mercy, truth, are matter of comfort to his people: But what comfort were there in any of these, if he were not eternal? Without eternity, all his other perfections were but as glorious withering flowers.

5. To enflame our love to him. Is he not worthy of our choicest affection and perpetual love, who is not only lovely in himself, but eternally lovely, and is from everlasting the centre of all excellency and perfection? Indeed he alone is worthy of our love. We lose our love, when it is laid out on perishing things: Therefore our interest, as well as our duty, obligeth us to set our love on him; for he is an object that cannot deceive our affection, but will be eternally possessed by all them that love him.

6. To engage us to diligence, constancy and perseverance in his service. When the psalmist had been speaking of the endless duration of the glory of God, what is the use he makes of this? *I will sing unto the Lord, says he, as long as I live; I will sing praise unto my God, while I have my being (m)*. And these words may be extended to other services as well as praise. Excellent things claim a veneration suitable to their excellency: So, God's eternal excellency gives him a right to our perpetual service. And his eternity doth also afford great encouragement to serve him; for, being eternal, our services are always present with him: he cannot forget them; and he lives for ever to reward them, so that we shall not serve him for nought.

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(k) Heb. xi. 25. (l) Rev. iv. 8. (m) Psal. civ. 31, 33.

DISCOURSE XIV.

Of the Glory of God.

SERMON LVI.

Psal. cxlviii. 13.—*His name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.*

I AM, in the last place, to shew that God is incomprehensible in his glory and blessedness, which two attributes arise from the other glorious perfections of his nature. I speak of the first from this text.

This psalm contains an exhortation to all sorts of creatures superior and inferior, to praise the Lord. These creatures are, in the preceding verses, ranked into their several orders, and then, in this verse, the exhortation is renewed, and a ground and reason thereof added. So that here we have,

1. An exhortation: *Let them praise the name of the Lord.* The name of the Lord is the Lord himself, as he hath made himself known to us by certain attributes manifested in his works. So that the meaning is, Let them shew forth the praises of his infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. Rational creatures are to do this actively; other creatures do it objectively, by representing the wonderful workmanship of their Creator.

2. The ground or reason thereof, in two expressions. The first is, *For his name alone is excellent.* His name is himself, as I said already. Or, by his name, we are to understand his fame and glory. So is God's name taken: *His name is great in Israel* (a), says the psalmist; that is, he is famous and renowned. Therefore famous men are said in scripture, to be *men of name* (b). *His name is EXCELLENT.* That is, his fame and glory is great, and far spread abroad; it is very eminent, sweet and savoury, like precious ointment. *His name is as ointment poured forth* (c); and, *his name ALONE is excellent.* Whatever name others have, yet there is no excellency in it, being compared with his. The second expression is, *his glory is above the earth and heaven.* His glory is the same with his name. It is *above the earth and heaven*; that is, whereas the glory of earthly

(a) Psal. lxxvi. 1. (b) Gen. vi. 4. Namb. xvi. 2. (c) Cant. i. 3.

ly monarchs is confined to this lower world, yea, to small parts thereof; the glory of God fills both heaven and earth: Yea, it is above them; they cannot contain his glory; it is far above our reach; it is infinite and incomprehensible; it surpasseth, not only the understandings of men on earth, but the understandings of all the angels in heaven.

The doctrine is this:

God is incomprehensible in his glory.

This is also clear from these pallel texts: *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth. The Lord is high above all nations; and his glory above the heavens (d).*

✓ Glory is often attributed to God in scripture. He is called the *King of glory (e)*, and the *God of glory (f)*: And we read of his *glorious name (g)*. Particularly, glory is attributed both to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. The Father is called the *Father of glory (h)*; the Son, the *Lord of glory (i)*; and the Holy Ghost, the *Spirit of glory (k)*. Moreover, that God is a glorious Being, is plainly implied in these texts of scripture that attribute greatness to him. David cries out, *Thou art great, O Lord (l)*: And, says the psalmist, *The Lord is a great God, and a great King, above all gods (m)*. And we read of his *great name (n)*. God is great, not in bulk and quantity; for that is proper to bodies; but in excellency, worth, and perfection. His greatness denotes an incomprehensible and unmeasurable largeness of all excellencies. Again, that God is a glorious Being is implied in these texts of scripture that ascribe majesty to him. *With God is terrible majesty (o)*. He is said to be *clothed with majesty (p)*: And we read of the *glorious honour of his majesty (q)*. Majesty is proper to kings; therefore, when we speak to them, we say, Your Majesty. By the majesty of God, we are to understand his admirable greatness, glory, dignity and excellency, for which he is to be praised, honoured, and adored, by men and angels.

So

(d) Psal. viii. 1. lvii. 5. cviii. 5. and cxiii. 4. (e) Psal. xxiv. 7. (f) Psal. xxix. 3. Acts vii. 2. (g) Deut. xxviii. 58. Neh. ix. 5. (h) Eph. i. 7. (i) 1 Cor. ii. 8. James ii. 4. (k) 1 Pet. iv. 14. (l) 2 Sam. vii. 22. (m) Psal. xcv. 3. (n) Josh. vii. 9. 1 Kings viii. 42. Psal. xcix. 3. (o) Job xxxvii. 22. (p) Psal. xciii. 1. and civ. 1. (q) Psal. cxlv. 5.

So that God is a glorious Being. And he must needs be so,
 1. Because he hath made many of his creatures glorious. The sun, moon, and stars, are glorious creatures (r). And he hath laid glory and majesty on kings and princes. The church, speaking of the king, says, *Honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him* (s). Therefore God himself must be far more glorious. 2. The creation, preservation, and government of the world, are all designed, by God, for his own glory; that is, to declare and manifest it: For, *he hath made all things for himself; and of him, and through him, and to him are all things* (t). Nor can he have any other supreme end in any of his works but his own glory.

But in what sense is glory attributed to God? Or, What is the glory of God? That I may in some measure clear this, I shall first shew you, what glory is, in general; and then apply it to the purpose in hand.

Glory is the splendor and shining of a thing, resulting and arising from the eminency and excellency it hath above other things, and for which it is esteemed, reputed, and in fame with others. So that there is a twofold glory of a thing, subjective and objective. The subjective glory of a thing, is the shining excellency thereof, which procures esteem, fame and reputation to it. Hence, in scripture, glory and excellency are put for the same thing: *The glory of Lebanon*, says the prophet, *shall be given unto it; the excellency of Carmel and Sharon* (u). The objective glory of a thing, is that esteem, repute, and fame, that it hath with others, upon the account of its shining excellency. Therefore the Greek word * signifies both fame and glory. Hence some define glory, † *The illustrious fame of an excellency with praise*.

Now, to apply this to my present purpose, the glory of God is twofold, subjective and objective. The subjective glory of God, is that glory which he hath in himself. The objective glory of God, is his glory as it shines forth to us in certain objects, on which he hath left some impress or characters of his glory. I shall discourse a little of each of these. And now, when I am to speak of the glory of God, I may be justly afraid lest I *darken counsel by words without knowledge*, and do but obscure and darken his glory, while I offer to tell you what it is. O that you and I may be helped to hear and speak of his glory, with

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(r) 1 Cor. xv. 41. (s) Psal. xxi. 5. (t) Prov xvi. 4. Rom. xi. 36. (u) Isa. xxxv. 2. * δόξα.

† *Excellentis virtutis fama cum laude*. Owen on the Heb. C. 3.

deep reverence and adoration; and a deep humility, under the sense of our vileness before him; and a becoming modesty, that we may not curiously pry into his glory, as if we could search it out: For indeed, it is incomprehensible; we are not able to comprehend the one ten thousand part of it. It is above the reach of the understandings even of the glorious angels. Therefore I shall only endeavour to speak something about his glory, as he shall be pleased to assist, agreeably to what himself hath revealed. And so I shall discourse a little,

1. *Of the subjective glory of God.*
2. *Of his objective glory.*

I. I begin with the subjective glory of God, which is that glory he hath in himself. This again is twofold, essential, which is common to the three divine persons; and personal, which is proper to each person of the Deity.

First, The essential glory of God, is the resplendent lustre and brightness of his infinite and transcendent excellency. So that the glory of God, is not so much a distinct attribute, as the lustre of all his attributes together, the shining excellency which results from them all. So that it takes in these two,

1. *The infinite excellency of God.*
2. *The resplendent lustre and brightness of that excellency.*

(1.) The infinite excellency of God. His transcendent and surpassing worth. The glory of God is that excellency that is in him. Therefore, they are put for the same thing, in that text, *They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God* (x). Excellency is attributed to persons of great dignity; we call them, *Your Excellency*: So, God's excellency denotes, his high dignity and pre-eminence.

I shall speak a little to this, the rather because it is a part of my text. *His name alone is excellent.* All created excellency is none at all, in comparison of the divine excellency. The greatest excellency of men is but fading. *Doth not their excellency, which is in them, go away* (y)? It is but a mere shadow, being compared with the excellency of God. Yea, the excellency even of angels, is nothing in comparison; for they cover and veil their faces before him (z), as being ashamed of their excellency

(x) Isa. xxxv. 2.

(y) Job iv. 21.

(z) Isa. vi. 3.

excellency in the presence of him whose name alone is excellent.

There is a twofold excellency of God.

1. The excellency of his being. His being alone is excellent; because there is no such being as his. For, 1. He is the original Being: He hath his being of and from himself. But all the creatures are derivative beings; they have their beings of him, and from him. 2. His being is for himself; other beings are not for themselves, but for another; they are all for him. *The Lord hath made all things for himself; and, all things were created by him, and for him (a).* But it is the excellency of God's being, that what he is, he is for himself, as well as from himself. He is his own end, as well as his own beginning. 3. His being is independent. All other beings depend on him. *In him they live, and move, and have their being (b).* If God suspended the influence of his providence but for one moment, they would in that very moment sink into nothing. But no creature ever contributed any thing toward the continuance or happiness of God's being. In a word, God is the infinite, eternal, unchangeable, absolutely perfect, and incomprehensible Being. So that there is no such being as his. He hath an excellency of being above all other beings. The creatures are non-entities, no beings, in comparison of him *. His name is, *I AM*. All other beings are but shadows, yea, nothing to him. *All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: • Yea, in comparison of him, they are less than nothing and vanity (c).*

2. The excellency of his attributes. Not only angels, but men, may be wise, holy, just, merciful, &c. But are they wise, holy, just, merciful, &c. as he is? No, no; he excels infinitely in all these, being infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in them all. *He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of Justice (d).* So, he is excellent in wisdom, in goodness, and in all his other attributes.

Thus we see that he is incomparably excellent. His excellency is infinitely beyond the understandings and apprehensions of men and angels. For, 1. He is all excellency. There is nothing in him but what is excellent. As the spouse saith of her beloved, *He is altogether lovely (e).* He is altogether excellent; nothing but excellency; pure and unmixed excellency:

(a) Prov. xvi 4. Col. i. 16.

(b) Acts xvii. 28.

* Therefore the heathens called God *τὸ ὄν*, the only Being.

(c) Dan. iv. 35. Isa. xl. 17. (d) Job xxxvii. 23. (e) Cant. v. 16.

lency: For, *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (f)*.
 2. He is the fountain of all excellency. Whatever excellency is in any creature springeth from this fountain. He is the original cause of all created excellency. 3. All excellency is eminently and virtually in him. All these excellencies that are scattered among all the creatures in heaven and earth, do all center in him after an infinite manner. Yea, all the excellencies of angels and men are not worthy to be a shadow of the transcendent excellency of God. 4. He is the standard all excellency. Other things are more or less excellent, according as they have more or less of a relation or likeness to God. The saints are *the excellent ones in the earth (g)*: Why? Because they are the people of God, his portion and peculiar treasure, and have the stamp and image of God upon them. The Bible is the most excellent book, the book of books: Why? Because it is the book of God, the *oracles of God*. Grace is an excellent thing; because it is the image of God, and a conformity to his nature. So that, the more of God there be in any thing, and the more nearly it is related to him, the more excellent it is. 5. He is so excellent that he is infinitely above all the worship and adoration of men and angels. He is *exalted above all blessing and praise (h)*. Blessing and praising God is the most high and honourable act of our worship; therefore it will be the employment of the saints in their most high and honourable state in heaven. But God is infinitely above all this. The angels and glorified saints, though their powers be stretched out to the uttermost, and the strings of their faculties screwed up to the highest pitch, in praising God; yet, to all eternity, they will never be able to bless and praise him suitably and answerably to his glorious excellency.

(2.) The glory of God takes in the resplendent lustre and brightness of the divine excellency. The glory of God is the sparkling of the Deity, the lustre of all the divine perfections. Hence he is said to be *glorious in power*; and *glorious in holiness*: and we read of *the glory of his grace (i)*. And so we may speak of the glory of his wisdom, goodness, truth, and other attributes. So that the glory of God, is the resplendent lustre of the divine perfections; the brightness of the divine excellency. Do but consider distinctly the many perfections of God, his infinite power, wisdom, holiness, goodness, &c. And then gather them all into one sum, if you can, and consider

(f) 1 John i. 5. (g) Psal. xvi. 3. (h) Neh. ix. 5. (i) Exod. xv. 6, 11. Eph. i. 6.

sider what an excellent and glorious being he is: And then conceive one resplendent brightness, beaming forth from him who is all these, essentially, originally and infinitely; this is *the glory of God*. Hence he is said to *dwell in light inaccessible*: and Christ is called *the brightness of his glory* (k). This brightness of the divine excellency, is not the object of bodily sight, but of that which is mental: Though indeed sometimes an external splendor and brightness hath been adhibited, as a symbol or shadowy representation thereof: as at Christ's transfiguration; and to the shepherds; and in Ezekiel's vision (l). And this resplendent brightness, though perfectly known to God himself; yet doth so dazzle the eyes of a created mind, that we cannot see it and live (m). I shall not engage in that debate, whether the glorified saints shall see the very essence of God, or his essential glory: But most certain it is, and plain from the text just now quoted, that it cannot be seen in this life, no not with the eyes of the mind.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew, what the essential glory of God is, according to our weak capacity. In this, God is incomparable. His glory is such, that, in comparison of him, all created glory is nothing. Such of the creatures as have any glory, have none like his; yea, none at all, being compared with him. Angels excel in created glory; yet when they come to be compared with God, *they are not pure in his sight*, and *he chargeth them with folly*; and they cover their faces at the brightness of his glory (n). Particularly, the glory of God is,

1. Essential to him; as all his attributes and perfections are whence his glory doth result. The angels that sinned are stript of their primitive glory, yet their essence remains: But the glory of God is inseparable from his essence. Yea, his glory is his very essence; it is himself. When Moses desired God to shew him his glory, the Lord answers, *Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live* (o). So that God's glory is his face, and his face is himself. The glory of the divine essence is the Deity itself.

2. It is original glory. He doth not derive it from any other, but hath it from and of himself. It is not borrowed from the creatures. But the glory of all creatures is derivative. God challengeth Job, *Deck thyself now with majesty and*
excel-

(k) 1 Tim. vi. 16. Heb. i. 3. (l) Matth. xvii. Luke ii. 9. Ezek. i. (m) Exod. xxxiii. 20. (n) Job iv. 18. Isa. vi. 3. (o) Exod. xxxiii. 20.

excellency, and array thyself with glory and beauty (p). Do it, if thou canst. It is proper to God alone, to clothe himself with glory and majesty. He is the fountain of all created glory. All creatures that have any glory, shine with beams borrowed from the glory of God. All the glory and majesty of kings and princes is derived from him: *The most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar majesty, and glory, and honour (q).* And all spiritual glory and beauty is also from the fountain (r).

3. His glory is immutable and unchangeable. His declarative glory may; but † his essential glory admits not, in the least, any increase or decrease.

4. His glory is everlasting. All the glory of the creature is *as the flower of the field (s)*, fading. Every thing in the world, the more beautiful it is, is the more brittle. But the glory of God, as it is eternal, a glory *before the world was*; so, it *endures for ever (t)*.

5. His glory is infinite. He is without measure, yea, above all measure, glorious. *His glory is above the earth and heaven (u).* It is boundless and unmeasurable, a glory as infinite as his essence. All that we are, have, do, and suffer, can add nothing to his essential glory. Hence,

6. It is incomprehensible; *above the earth and heaven.* It is beyond the understandings and apprehensions of men and angels. It is a *light that no man can approach unto (x)*. If a man search boldly into it, he will be swallowed up and overpowered by it. Even a faint ray of God's glory darted upon Moses' face made it shine so, that the children of Israel were afraid to come near him: How much less can we look on the bright shining of God's glorious face? Yea, the brightness of his glory would dazzle the very angels; therefore they are represented as having *wings wherewith they cover their faces (y)*.

S E R M O N LVII.

Secondly, **I** Come to speak of the personal glory of God. The essential glory of God, of which I have spoken, is common to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the unity of the divine essence; for they are equal in glory. But there

(p) Job. xl. 10. (q) Dan. v. 18. (r) Ezek. xvi. 14.

† *Magna est ejus Gloria, quæ nullis laudibus crescit, & nullius Vituperatione minuitur.* Cass in Epist.

(s) Isa. xl. 6. (t) John xvii. 5. (u) Psal civ. 31. (x) 1 Tim. vi. 16. (y) Isa. vi. 3.

there is also a personal glory, which is proper to each person of the Deity.

1. It is the personal glory of the Father, that he is simply from none, being first in order of having life. He *hath life in himself*, and *hath given to the Son to have life in himself* (a). In this sense, he is called by the ancient fathers, † *The Fountain of the Deity*: not absolutely, as to the existence of the Deity; but respectively, as to its communication. So that, it is the glory of the Father, that he begets the Son from eternity, in communicating his nature with him by eternal and ineffable generation. Again, it is the personal glory of the Father, that he is the first person, as in order of subsistence, so also in order of operation. All things are of the Father by the Son. So it is said, *He created all things by Jesus Christ*; and he *hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ* (b). All operations begin first from the Father. *The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: For, what things soever he doth, these also doth the Son likewise* (c). Again, it is the personal glory of the Father, that in the œconomy of our salvation, he sustains the majesty of the Deity, and represents the person of the Lawgiver vindicating the authority of his law, and of the Judge to whom satisfaction is made.

2. It is the personal glory of the Son, that he is the only begotten Son of God, by eternal and ineffable generation; whereby, as the Son, he receives his subsistence from the Father, so fully and absolutely, that he is every way the same with him, in respect of his essence; and every way like him, in respect of his person. On this account, he is said to be *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person* (d). And hence there is ascribed to him, *a glory as of the only begotten of the Father* (e): that is, a glory suitable to, and becoming the Son of God; a glory proper to him, and incommunicable to any other. Again, it is the glory of the Son, that he is the second person, as in order of subsistence, so also in order of operation: so that he sends the Spirit, and works by him. There are divers expressions in the New Testament to this purpose (f). Lastly, it is the personal glory of the Son, that in the œconomy of our salvation, he is our Saviour and Redeemer, the purchaser of salvation for elect sinners, and the blessed Bridegroom of souls.

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(a) John v. 26.

† *Fons Deitatis.*

(b) Eph. iii. 9. 2 Cor. v. 18.

(c) John v. 19.

(d) Heb. i. 3.

(e) John i. 14. (f) See John xv. 26. and xvi. 7.

3. It is the personal glory of the Holy Spirit, that he proceeds from the Father and the Son, by spiration, (whence he is called the Spirit,) whereby he receives from them his subsistence as a divine person, so that he is every way the same with them in respect of his essence. Again, it is the personal glory of the Holy Ghost, that in the oconomy of our salvation, he is the Applier of Christ's purchase, the Executor of Christ's Testament, and so the Sanctifier, Teacher, Guide, and Comforter of his people.

Thus I have hinted a little at that personal glory that is proper to each person of the Deity. Though this is a glorious and incomprehensible mystery; yet I humbly apprehend that these things are agreeable to our conceptions of things, so far as we can apprehend such glorious mysteries. Only, what I have delivered, doth not argue any essential difference or inequality between the blessed persons. The glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is alike glory, considered personally; but the same glory, considered essentially: for they are equal in glory. Though they are one in essence, and consequently have the same essential glory; yet the persons being distinct, they have also a distinct personal glory.

So much concerning the subjective glory of God. Now,

II. Let me speak a little of the objective glory of God, which is his glory, as it shines forth to us in certain objects, on which he hath left some impress of it, some dark resemblance, or imperfect representation of his glory. This is usually called his declarative or manifestative glory: some imperfect manifestations of his incomprehensible glory and excellency. So is the glory of God taken, in these texts that *speake of the earth's being filled with his glory (g)*: we are thereby to understand his declarative glory, or the declarations and manifestations of his glory.

Here then, I shall shew you how the glory of God is manifested, 1. By God himself. 2. By the three persons of the Deity, who glorify one another. And, 3. How we are to manifest his glory.

First, God manifests his own glory, both in this life, and in that which is to come.

(1.) In this life: and that both extraordinarily, and more ordinarily.

Extraordinarily. God hath sometimes manifested his glory by extraordinary signs and representations thereof to the sons of men: such as some shining brightness. So, we read that

(g) Numb. xiv. 21. Psal. lxxii. 19. Isa. vi. 3.

the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud (h); that is, the cloud shined with an unusual brightness. And it is said that *the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds (i)*. And frequently, in the Old Testament, we read of *the glory of the Lord* filling the tabernacle and the temple (*k*). Again, God hath manifested his glory, sometimes by certain apparitions and visions: Thus, Isaiah and Ezekiel saw his glory (*l*); and sometimes by miracles (*m*). But these extraordinary ways of manifesting his glory being now ceased, let us see how he manifests his glory more ordinarily, 1. By his word. 2. In his works.

1. He manifests his glory by his word. The holy scriptures are a glass wherein we may behold the clear reflections of the glory of God. As mens' writings bear a stamp of their excellencies upon them; so, much more the holy scriptures bear upon them an impress of the glorious excellencies of God. The law sets forth the glory of his infinite justice and holiness: therefore glory is attributed to it. But the gospel doth more especially manifest his glory; therefore, it is said to *exceed in glory (n)*. In the gospel he hath manifested the glory of his infinite wisdom, love, and grace: Hence it is called *the glorious gospel (o)*. The glory of God shines more brightly in the gospel, than in all the works he hath made.

2. God manifests his glory in his works, both of creation and providence. 1. In his works of creation. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork (p)*. In the creatures we may behold the glory of his infinite power, wisdom and goodness: *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead (q)*. Therefore, after the psalmist had spoken of the creatures, he celebrates the glory of God shining forth in them: *The glory of the Lord, says he, shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works (r)*. 2. In his works of providence. He is said to be *excellent in working (s)*: and he must be so, because he is excellent in being. There are in divine providence many instances and examples wherein we may behold the glory of God's infinite power, wisdom, justice, holiness, &c. shining forth to us. Particularly, in his works of mercy toward his church and people,

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(h) Exod. xvi. 10. (i) Luke ii. 9. (k) Exod. xl. 34. 1 Kings viii. 10. (l) Isa. vi. Ezek. i. 28, 29. (m) Numb. xiv. 22. John ii. 11. (n) 2 Cor. iii. 9. (o) 1 Tim. i. 11. (p) Psal. xix. 1. (q) Rom. i. 20. (r) Psal. civ. 31. (s) Isa. xxviii. 29.

he manifests the glory of his infinite power and wisdom, and of his infinite goodness, love to, and care of his people. Hence the psalmist says, when he celebrates God's works of mercy toward his church, *His work is honourable and glorious (t)*. And, praying for the church, he says, *Let thy work appear unto thy servants; and thy glory unto their children*: and when he builds up Zion, he is said to *appear in his glory (u)*. Next, in his works of judgment, he manifests the glory of his power, and of his infinite holiness and hatred of sin. Hence Moses, in his Song, celebrates the glory of these divine perfections: *Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; and, who is like thee, glorious in holiness (x)*?

But more especially, there are these two works of providence, wherein the glory of God is most signally manifested.

[1.] The work of redemption by Christ. Hence, when God is speaking of that great work, it is often added, *that I may be glorified*. And the coming of Christ as the light, and the rising of the glory of God upon us, are knit together: *Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee (y)*. And when the angels brought unto the shepherds the glad tidings of Christ's birth, immediately a multitude of the heavenly host praised God, saying, *Glory to God in the highest (z)*. In our redemption by Christ, we have the fullest, clearest, and most delightful manifestation of the glory of God, that ever was or shall be in this life. All the declarations and manifestations we have of his glory, in his works of creation and common providence, are but dim and obscure in comparison. Yea, much of the glory of creation had sunk and fallen to the ground, if redemption had not succeeded.

[2.] His glory shines in his works of grace on the hearts of his elect. There is a glory and majesty manifested, when he rides triumphantly in the gospel chariot, and is victorious in subduing rebellious sinners to himself (a). His glorious power is manifested, in overcoming the sinner's obstinacy and stubbornness; his glorious wisdom, in alluring and charming the heart, and overcoming it with the art of heaven; and the riches and freedom of his glorious grace, in letting out so much of his love on some sinners, passing by others as good or better than they. And then, his glory is manifested in stamping a glory on his people, working in them such dispositions, where-
by

(t) Psal. cxi. 3. (u) Psal. xc. 16. and cii. 16. (x) Exod. xv. 6, 11. (y) Isa. xlix. 3, lx. 21. and lx. 1. (z) Luke ii. 13, 14. (a) Psal. xlv. 3, &c.

by they resemble his glorious Majesty. Hence it is said, that *Christ gave himself for the church; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church: and that the King's daughter is all glorious within (b)*. Again, the glory of his infinite goodness and mercy, and of his matchless love and grace, is manifested in supplying the spiritual wants of his people, in pardoning their sins, healing their diseases, feeding and feasting their souls, guiding, conducting and helping them in all their straits and difficulties: And the glory of his wisdom is manifested in counter-working the stratagems of Satan, and the deceits of the flesh; and the glory of his power, in confirming them to the end, and preserving them to his heavenly kingdom. Hence the apostle tells us, that God's end, in giving grace to some sinners, and fitting them for the heavenly inheritance, is that they *might be to the praise of his glory (c)*; that is, that his glory might be manifested and set forth in them.

Thus I have shewed you how God manifests his glory in this life. But all that he is pleased to manifest of it, is but little to what is in him. There is infinitely more in him than is manifested to us. Yet observe these two things about this. 1. Even so much of the glory of God as is manifested in this life, obscureth all other glory. *Behold, even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in thy sight (d)*. As when the sun shineth, the stars are not seen; so, when God's glory shines, no other glory is seen. All the glory of the world *evanisheth* at the appearance of the glory of the Lord. 2. Even so much of the glory of God as is manifested in this life is inconceivable and incomprehensible; especially what he hath manifested thereof in the glorious work of redemption. Search as much as we will, we cannot get to the bottom of this glory. Yea, the glorious angels themselves cannot comprehend or fathom it; therefore it is said, they *desire to look, or pry, into these things (e)*.

(2.) God will manifest his glory to his people in the life to come. His glory will then be manifested to the glorified saints, in a far more excellent way and manner than it is now to the eye of faith. It was in heaven that Stephen *saw the glory of God*. There, the saints shall be *presented before the presence of his glory*. There they shall *behold his glory, and see God as he is, and face to face (f)*. The divine glory shall then be unclouded,

(b) Eph. v. 25, 26, 27. Psal. xlv. 13. (c) Eph. i. 12. (d) Job xxv. 5. (e) 1 Pet. i. 12. (f) Acts vii. 55. Jude 24. John xvii. 24. 1 John iii. 2. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

ed, whereas now we have but some obscure glimmerings of it. Hence it is said to be a *glory yet to be revealed* (g). Whatever appearances of divine glory are offered here to our view, yet there is still something within the curtain that will outshine all. Divine glory will then shine in its meridian lustre. It is true, that manifestation of the glory of God will be proportioned to the creature's capacity, else it would confound and not satisfy; yet it will be fully adequate to the most enlarged capacity of the glorified saints.

Secondly, The glory of God is manifested by the three Persons of the Deity, who glorify one another. And,

1. The Father glorified the Son. Hence our Lord prays, *Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son* (h). And he tells his disciples, *God shall glorify him* (i). (that is, *the Son*) *in himself, and shall straightway glorify him*. Particularly, the Father glorified the Son, 1. By many miracles, whereby God openly owned him and demonstrated his Deity: Especially, by the miracles wrought at his death, whereby the frame of nature seemed to be put out of course; which was so convincing that the Roman centurion and soldiers turned confessors of his name, saying, *Truly this was the Son of God* (k). 2. By sustaining and upholding him in his sufferings, especially in his agony; so that he bore up under his sharpest sufferings, and thereby discovered the strength and power of the Godhead, and gave the most signal testimony of his obedience to the Father, being *obedient even unto death* (l). Again, in his sufferings he was glorified, in executing the office of a priest for his people: In acting the part of a triumphing Redeemer upon the cross: In the glorious purchase he made of the best blessings for his redeemed ones: And lastly, in conquering sin and Satan, *spoiling principalities and powers*, snatching the prey out of their hands, and *triumphing over them* upon the cross (m): so that the cross was his victorious and triumphal chariot. And his conquests were the more glorious, considering the way and manner of them, that he overcame by ignominy, weakness, suffering and death. It is with an eye to all this that Christ prays, *Father, glorify thy Son* (n). 3. In declaring him openly to be the Son of God, by raising him from the dead (o). His resurrection from the dead was a powerful and miraculous testimony given by God unto this truth. Hence,

his

(g) 1 Pet. iv. 13. (h) John xvii. 1. (i) John xiii. 32.
 (k) Matth. xxvii. 54. (l) Phil. ii. 8. (m) Heb. v. 4, 5. Rev.
 v. 5. Heb. ix. 12. Col. ii. 14, 15. (n) John xvii. 1. (o) Rom. i. 4.

his resurrection is ascribed to the Father (p). 4. By his glorious exaltation. With respect to this it is said that *God raised him from the dead, and gave him glory (q)*. This is the glory he was to enter into after his sufferings. His human nature was crowned with glory and honour (r); clothed with all that glory that a finite nature is capable of: And the glory of his Godhead, which had been obscured before under the veil of our sinful infirmities, brake out with a splendid lustre: For this he prays, *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was (s)*. And he had a mediatory glory given him; when he was set at *God's right hand*, to make all his enemies stoop to him; and had a name given him above every name; and was solemnly inaugurated into the headship of the church, and vested with authority to rule according to pleasure; *all power in heaven and earth being given to him*; and angels, principalities and powers, being made subject to him, and *nothing left that is not put under him (t)*. With respect to this mediatory glory, it is said, that *the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Christ was not yet glorified (u)*. 5. By propagating his spiritual kingdom. Christ is glorified, when his kingdom is enlarged, and his mediatory crown flourisheth; when in his majesty he rides prosperously (x), in the chariot, or on the white horse of the gospel, and conquers and subdues sinners to himself. Therefore, when he subdues the nations to himself, he is represented having many crowns on his head (y); importing the great glory he hath by such victories and triumphs over his enemies. And his glorious success in establishing and propagating his kingdom is in scripture ascribed to the Father, being that which he promised to the Son. So that the Father glorifies Christ when he sends the Spirit to accompany the dispensation of Christ's word and gospel, which is the sword going out of his mouth; and makes the same effectual, by his almighty power and blessing, for gaining souls to Christ, and engaging them to submit to his sceptre and government (z).

2. The Son glorifies the Father. Hence he prays, *Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee (a)*. Much of the

(p) Acts ii. 24. and xiii. 30, 33. (q) 1 Pet. i. 21. (r) Luke xxiv. 26. Heb. ii. 7. (s) John xvii. 5. (t) Psal. cx. 1. Phil. ii. 9. Eph. i. 22. Psal. cx. 2. Matth. xxviii. 18. 1 Pet. iii. 22. Heb. ii. 8. (u) John vii. 39. (x) Psal. xlv. 3, &c. (y) Rev. xix. 12. (z) See Psal. ii. 8. lxxii. 8, &c. and cx. 2, 3. Isa. lv. 5. Rev. xix. 15. (a) John xviii. 1.

the glory of God is to be seen and read in *the face of Christ*. In Christ God appears *glorious (b)*. He glorified the Father, 1. In his life: By his obedience and whole conversation. *I honour my Father (c)*, says he. By his doctrine, whereby he proclaimed the Father's glory, discovered his glorious essence, and the purity of his worship, and frequently ascribed the great things he did to the Father: And lastly, by his miracles, which gave occasion to the people to *glorify God*. Of all this Christ says, *I have glorified thee on the earth (d)*. 2. In and by his death and sufferings. Hence he says to his disciples, when the time of his greatest sufferings was at hand, *Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him*: and he prays, *Father glorify thy name (e)*; to wit, by my sufferings. He sought his Father's glory more than his own ease. Then it follows, *Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again*. So that the Father is glorified, not only in Christ's life, but also in his sufferings, whereby he accomplished the work of redemption, and *finished the work that the Father gave him to do (f)*: But of this I hinted a little already, and may have occasion to speak of it at more length afterward. 3. In his exaltation. The power and faithfulness of God were thereby gloriously manifested. The glory of the Father shines in the glory of the Son. 4. By subduing the nations to the obedience of the Father; and raising up a people to serve him, both among Jews and Gentiles, to the praise of the glory of his grace. To this purpose is that promise the Father makes to him, *Thou art my Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified (g)*. And in verse 6th, it is declared how he would be glorified in him, viz. by his being *a light to the Gentiles, and his salvation to the ends of the earth*.

3. The Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son. 1. He glorifies the Father. It may be in this sense that he is called *the Spirit of glory and of God (h)*. It is by the light of the Spirit darted in upon the heart, that we see the glory of God. Hence, he is called *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (i)*. 2. He glorifies the Son. *He shall glorify me*, says Christ, *for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you (k)*. The Spirit glorifies Christ, by proclaiming in all ages Christ's glory and excellency, in his person, doctrine, and operations, to the

(b) 2 Cor. iv. 6. Isa. xlix. 3. (c) John viii. 49. (d) Matth. ix. 8. Mark ii. 12. John xvii. 4. (e) John xiii. 31. and xii. 28. (f) John xvii. 4. (g) Isa. xlix. 3. (h) 1 Pet. iv. 14. (i) Eph. i. 17. (k) John xvi. 14.

the conviction and consolation of believers; by bringing all that Christ did and suffered in his state of humiliation to a glorious effect; by communicating to believers the blessings purchased by Christ, and influences of grace from him as the head; and by making his word singularly effectual for the conversion and edification of souls. By all which he exalts the person of Christ, and manifests his glory as the purchaser and storehouse of all blessings for his people.

4. The Father and the Son glorify the Holy Ghost, by sending him to apply the redemption purchased by Christ, and to perfect and consummate the eternal design of God's love upon the hearts of the elect, as their Teacher, Sanctifier, Guide and Comforter in their way to glory (*l*); by all which the infinite wisdom, power, holiness, and tender compassion of the blessed Spirit, are manifested and glorified.

Third, How are we to manifest and declare the glory of God? We glorify God, not by adding any glory to him, seeing he is infinitely glorious: But by declaring and manifesting him to be glorious. Other creatures declare his glory passively or objectively, as I shewed already: But we are to do it actively, by giving our formal and explicit testimony to the appearances and out-breakings of his glory. This we are to do, both inwardly and outwardly, as the apostle exhorts: *Glorify God in your body and in your spirit (m)*. Inwardly, by a high and honourable esteem of him, a holy admiration of his excellency, love to him, delight in him, trusting in him, a holy fear of his name, &c. Outwardly, by holiness of life, diligence in duties of worship, advancing his kingdom, and promoting his interests to the glory of his name; as I may shew afterward at more length. But though we are thus to manifest his glory as much as we are able: yet can we never declare and manifest all his glory, seeing it is infinite and incomprehensible. *Who can shew forth all his praise (n)*.

S E R M O N LVIII.

I Shall now make application of this doctrine.

Use 1. For instruction, in divers particulars.

Instr. 1. It follows from this doctrine, that religious worship, honour and glory, is due unto God alone. From God's supreme majesty and glory results his adorability. His infinite
glory

(*l*) See John xiv. 16, 26. and xv. 26. (*m*) 1 Cor. vi. 20.
(*n*) Psal. cvi. 2.

glory and excellency is the formal reason why he ought to be adored and worshipped. There is a civil honour and worship due to men upon the account of some excellency in them, and honour proportionable to their excellency; so that it admits of degrees. But seeing the divine glory and excellency is infinitely beyond all other, therefore there is on the account thereof such an honour and worship due to him as cannot be attributed to any other: and this we call religious worship. Religious worship is nothing but the assignation of that honour which is due to divine excellencies. Now to assign that honour and glory which is proper to divine excellencies, where divine excellencies are not, is a manifest contradiction. Particularly, religious worship supposeth the object worshipped to be omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent; which are excellencies proper to God alone: Therefore all religious worship is to be given to him only. This is that which is required in the first commandment, *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.* And it is said, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve* (a). And the doing *service to them which by nature are no gods* (b), is condemned. The word used in this and the preceding texts, clears that it is the same worship and service which the papists affirm may be given to saints and angels: So that no kind of religious worship or service, under any name whatsoever, is to be given to any but God. This is that glory which is due to him alone (c).

From what is said it appears, that although Christ our Mediator be the object of religious worship, seeing he is very God; yet the only formal reason of that worship, or the account on which it is given to him, is the Deity alone. He is to be worshipped, only as he is God, and because he is God: For it is only as God that he hath that infinite glory and majesty, or these essential attributes, which are requisite in the object of religious worship. It is true, as Mediator, or in the virtue of his mediation, he is the ground of our access to and acceptance with God in any part of our worship; our access to God is by him, and on the account of his mediation; yet the formal reason of our worship is his divine glory and majesty alone. His person, who is the Mediator God-man, is the object of our worship; but the formal reason of it, or that which renders him a meet object of our worship, is his Deity. As he is God, he is the proper and ultimate object of our worship; but as Mediator between God and us, he

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(a) Matth. iv. 10. (b) Gal. iv. 8. (c) Isa. xlii. 8.

is only the immediate object thereof: For, *through him we believe on God; and through him we have access to the Father; and we come to the Father by him (d).*

Instr. 2. From this doctrine we are furnished with a proper character of the true religion. Seeing God is an infinitely glorious Being, that must needs be the best religion and the true doctrine, that doth most advance and extol his glory. That doctrine which extols the divine glory and majesty, is of God; but that which advanceth the power, pride, and merit of man, must be of men. Hence it follows, that the reformed protestant religion, is the only true religion. For, when we teach that nothing cometh to pass in time but what God decreed before all time; that God's chusing some, rather than others, from all eternity, to be holy and happy, is an act of sovereign grace, and that he neither was nor could be moved by any thing without himself; that the providence of God is of universal extent to all events and occurrences whatsoever; that men, in an unregenerate state, have no power to any thing that is spiritually good; that man cannot convert himself, nor co-operate in his own conversion; that the grace of God in conversion worketh mightily and insuperably; that we cannot, by any thing we can do, lay any obligation on God, nor merit any thing at his hand: In these and the like doctrines that are controverted between our adversaries and us, we plead for the glory of God, against the power, pride, and merit of man; but our adversaries plead for the power, pride and merit of man, against the glory of God: Therefore our religion must be the only true religion.

Instr. 3. See here the great honour and dignity of believers in Christ; they stand in near relation to a God of infinite glory. And, 1. They are his servants. How great an honour must this be, considering what an infinitely glorious Master he is? We reckon it a great honour to be servants to kings and princes: but how much more honourable must it be, to be servants to him, in comparison of whom the most glorious earthly potentates are but as grasshoppers, and less than nothing and vanity? The saints in all ages have reckoned it their great honour to be servants to God. David entitles the xviiiith psalm, *A psalm, not of David, king of Israel and Judah, but of David, the servant of the Lord.* It is a greater honour to be a servant to God, than to be a king over men. 2. They are the friends of God; and that is more. This honour was

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(c) 1 Pet. i. 21. Eph. ii, 18, John xiv. 6.

conferred upon Abraham, that he *was called the friend of God* (e). And it is conferred on all the faithful children of Abraham. So Christ tells his disciples, *Ye are my friends*; and, *I have called you friends* (f). O what an honour is this, to be the friends of such an infinitely glorious Majesty, to be the favourites and familiars of the great God! 3. They are *the children of God*; and this is yet more. Solomon tells us, *the glory of children are their fathers* (g). It is the glory of some children, that they have such and such honourable persons for their fathers: So, it is the great dignity of believers, that the infinitely glorious God is their Father. This is what they may glory in. 4. They are the bride and spouse of God. That is an admirable expression, *Thy Maker is thine husband*; *the Lord of Hosts is his name*: And that, *Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you* (h). What an honourable match is this, that vile sinful creatures should be married to the Lord and King of glory! How astonishing is it, that a God of infinite glory should be a husband to such a vile wretch as thou art! Mayest thou not cry out, "O what am I, and what is my father's house, that such a glorious Majesty should stoop so far below himself to such a worm as I!" O, the high dignity of believers in Christ!

Instr. 4. See here the great evil of sin, it being an offence committed against an infinitely glorious Being. The excellency, majesty, and glory of any person doth exceedingly heighten the offence committed against him. O then, of what a horrid and hainous nature must sin be, seeing it strikes against the glorious majesty of God, in comparison of whom the whole creation is less than nothing! Hence it is that there is an infinite evil in sin, in regard of the object against whom it is committed, viz. the glorious God. It is a dishonour done to him whose name alone is excellent. Hence the apostle says, *Through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God* (i)? It is a despising and vilifying him as unworthy to be obeyed or regarded; a preferring base things, and sinful satisfactions, to his favour and communion with him. Sin strikes against the glory of all his attributes. It is a despising his power, a contempt of his justice, a disparaging his wisdom, a rebelling against his sovereignty, and a disgrace to his holiness, which is the glory of all his attributes. If the glorious God should appear to you, and give you but one glimpse of his excellent glory,

(e) James ii. 23. (f) John xv. 14, 15. (g) Prov. xvii. 6.
(h) Isa. liv. 5. Jer. iii. 14. (i) Rom. ii. 23.

you would then entertain other thoughts of sin, and of yourselves for sin, than ever you had formerly. O, how would you lothe yourselves, as base, vile, and unworthy before him! The truth is, it cannot be conceived, much less expressed, what a dishonour sin is to God. And this is that which every gracious soul doth chiefly notice in his sad reflections upon his sin: So did David; *Against thee, says he, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight (k)*. The injuries done to Uriah and Bathsheba, were nothing to him, in comparison of the dishonour done to God: This is the burden of every gracious soul.

Use 2. For reproof, to many within the visible church, many professed Christians, who are enemies to the glory of God. And,

First, Some are altogether unconcerned for his glory. Alas, many of you, though you do not openly dishonour God, by running to the same excess of riot with other men; yet you please yourselves with a careless and lukewarm profession. You live careless lives, and never mind the great end of your creation and being. You hide your talent in a napkin, and bring no revenue of glory to God. Such of you are unprofitable burdens upon the earth, and wrong God by not studying to live up to the end of your creation: And you cannot escape heavy wrath; for the *unprofitable servant* will be *cast into outer darkness (l)*. Yea, even believers in Christ are not so active for the glory of God as they should be. How little is done in comparison of what might be done? How much is shamefully neglected, whether we consider our personal walk, or our public appearances and actings in our station for advancing his kingdom, and promoting his interests? Alas, that God hath so little glory even by the best among us. Is it not sad, that we lessen the revenue of his glory, and are so little concerned to promote it? You would have God glorified, but are careless of what is proper to yourselves for that end. As many learn their school-fellow's lessons better than their own: So, you would have God glorified, but you look to others more than to yourselves. You would have God glorifying himself, and you would have others glorifying him; but are not active in what is your own duty. You look to events more than duties. When you are concerned for the glory of God, you are more apt to ask, *Lord, what wilt thou do for the glory of thy name?* Than to ask, *Lord, what wilt thou have*

(k) Psal. li. 4.

(l) Matth. xxv. 30.

have me to do? You do not consider your own obligation, *How shall I glorify God?*

Second, Others rob God of his glory. But how can that be? Is not God infinitely, eternally, and immutably glorious? Indeed we cannot rob him of his essential glory, nor in the least diminish it. *If thou sinnest, says Elihu, what dost thou against him? Or, if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art (m).* Yet men may be said to rob him of his glory, 1. With respect to his essential glory; when it is their mind, will, and desire, to deprive him of his glory, as if it were in their power: God doth so account of this, as if they did indeed deprive him of it. 2 With respect to his declarative or manifestative glory, when men lessen that. Though we cannot take away any light from the sun, yet we may, by certain obstructions put in the way, hinder the light thereof from men: So, they rob God of his glory, who do in less or more hinder the brightness thereof from shining to others.

Particularly, men rob God of his glory, by ascribing that glory to themselves or others, which is only due to God. 1. By ascribing the glory of what they have or do unto themselves, and not to God. As Nebuchadnezzar did, when he said, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty (n)?* This was also Herod's crime (o): He made himself his own end, passively, by receiving the applauses and flatteries of the people. When you glory in your excellencies, gifts and endowments, whether of body or mind, as if you yourselves were the original and fountain-cause of them; when you ascribe the success of your endeavours to your own strength or wisdom; when you think that God accepts of you rather than others, because of some better qualities in you than in them; when you are puffed up with any thing you have done for God, as you had done it by your own power: In these and the like cases, you rob God of his glory; you take the crown off his head, and set it on your own. 2. By ascribing that glory to others which is only due to God. As when you ascribe the glory of these excellencies that you perceive in others, to themselves, and not to God. This was the sin of the people, when Herod made an eloquent oration to them: They cried out, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man (p).* Again, when people ascribe

(m) Job xxxv. 6, 8. (n) Dan. iv. 30. (o) Acts xii. 22, 23.

(p) Acts xii. 22.

ascribe the glory of their conversion or spiritual edification to ministers who were the instruments; as if the grace they have were from the abilities of the minister, rather than from the power and blessing of God: This is to rob God of his glory. People are apt to run upon extremes, to deify men, or to nullify them. When men have been instrumental in any glorious work, we are apt, instead of honouring them as instruments, to adore them as gods.

Thus, we see how men rob God of his glory. This is that which he cannot and will not bear with. Of all things God's glory is most dear to him, so that he cannot endure to be robbed of it. He *will not*, and therefore cannot endure that you should give his glory to another (q).

Third, Others oppose the glory of God, and fight against it. And that, 1. By opposing that whereby his glory is advanced, the settling and spreading of the gospel, the pure administration of the word and sacraments, the exercise of church government and discipline. 2. By maintaining and spreading such errors and heresies as are directly opposite to his glory; as, the lawfulness of giving religious worship to saints or angels, crying up the merit of our own good works, extolling the power of free-will, &c. Papists, Arminians, and other heretics, are enemies to the glory of God. 3. By horrid atheism and blasphemy; denying any of the glorious perfections of God, or speaking reproachfully of his blessed name. 4. By living profane and vicious lives. Hereby men rebel against the divine sovereignty, trample upon his laws, and enter the lists with him, as if they thought to be stronger than he. Especially, the profane lives of such as profess his name, give great occasion to enemies to blaspheme that worthy name by which they are called. *These are the people of the Lord*, said the Heathens, of the dispersed Jews, that lived profanely (r).

Fourth, Others aim at their own glory and praise in all they do. Particularly, in their public appearances for religion; as Jehu, who, in vain-glory, said, *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord*: And in their religious duties; as the Pharisees, who did all that they might be *seen of men*, and have glory of *them* (s).

Mens' aiming at their own glory and praise appears, 1. In envying the gifts and graces of others. They would shine alone, and think that the commonness of gifts and graces derogates

(q) Isa. xlii. 8. (r) 2 Sam. xii. 14. Rom. ii. 24. Ezek. xxxvi. 20. (s) 2 Kings x. 16. Matth. vi. 2, 5, and xxiii. 5.

gates from their esteem. 2. In being highly concerned for affronts and injuries done to themselves, but little or nothing concerned for the dishonour done to God; when men cannot endure to have their own honour and reputation invaded, but are careless in what concerns the honour of God. Like Saul, who was very earnest to be honoured by Samuel before the people, but had no sense of the great dishonour he himself had done to God by his disobedience (t). 3. In being more in public duties than in private; and seemingly zealous in their public appearances, but in private duties careless, lukewarm, and indifferent.

But to make your own glory and praise your chief aim is a great evil. For, 1. You thereby usurp the rights of the Godhead: For, it is God's prerogative to be his own end, and to act for his own glory. To mind chiefly your own glory and praise, is to set yourselves in the place of God, and to affect a royal state equal with him. 2. You rob God of his tribute. God hath given many things to you, only he hath reserved this, his glory he *will not give to another* (u). This is the rent and tribute which he requires from his creatures, which you rob him of. 3. It is a great contempt of God. It is a postponing God to yourselves, and making yourselves superiors to him.

Use 3. For lamentation, that God is so little glorified in the earth. Oh! how little glory hath he among men? Alas, the whole world lies in wickedness. Cast your eyes abroad among the barbarous Pagan nations. What glory hath he there in an active way? Alas, none at all. All the creatures, in all parts of the world, glorify God passively or objectively; only man is capable of glorifying him actively: yet how little hath he of this in the most part of the nations? Alas, in the generality of the nations God is highly dishonoured by abominable idolatry, and all kinds of abominations. And, in the Christian world, how much is his name dishonoured by heresy in doctrine, idolatry and superstition in worship, and gross corruptions in manners? Yea, even in the purest churches, he is much dishonoured by them that profess his name.

Come we to the time and place wherein our lot is fallen: How many things are wanting to his honour! Alas, the power and glory of God is not so seen in the sanctuary as sometimes it hath been: and the discipline of the church hath little effect upon the hearts and consciences of sinners to the glory of his name. What a degenerate corrupt age is this wherein we live?

(t) 1 Sam. xv. (u) Isa. xlviii. 11.

live? What atheistical and blasphemous opinions are vended, that strike directly against the glory of God? What cursing, swearing, and blasphemy; what abominable uncleanness, and drunkenness, and gross profanation of the Lord's day, do every where abound? And is it not matter of grief, that men are become so impudent and obstinate in sin, that they declare their sin as Sodom, and refuse to be reclaimed? How can we walk up and down the streets without grief, when we see here a staggering drunkard, and there a profane swearer rending and tearing the sacred name of God in pieces? Nothing is opposite to the glory of God, but should very deeply affect our hearts. Indeed, if we love God, we cannot but grieve for his dishonour. If you have had any saving discoveries of his glory, you cannot endure any thing either done or said against it. No mere man ever had, in this life, such a clear glimpse of the glory of God as Moses had; and never was any mere man so holily impatient when any blemish was cast upon it. O, how dear should the glory of God be to you! When you see his glory trampled upon by wicked men, his great name rent by so many blasphemies, so many affronts put upon his grace, and his laws trodden under foot; these things should cut you to the heart. Alas, that there is so little of this temper among us! Outward troubles and inconveniencies, and personal injuries, do sometimes cause grief and vexation of soul: But, alas, how little grief is there for the dishonour done to the glorious name of God? This is matter of sad lamentation.

S E R M O N LIX.

Use 4. **F**OR trial. How stand you affected toward the glory of God? Is his glory chiefly eyed and aimed at by you? Are your hearts most set upon this, to have God glorified? If you have a right frame of heart with respect to the glory of God, you may know it by these things, 1. His glory will be very dear to you, and lie very near your heart. Father and mother, wife and children, yea, your own life also, will not be so dear to you as the glory of God will be. 2. You will be zealously active for his glory. You will make it your great employment and business, in your respective places and stations, to advance it. You will speak and act for his glory, and be at all pains to promote his interests, as ability and opportunity serveth. 3. You can never think that you have done enough for this end, but will be studying and contriving what you may do more for promoting his honour and glory, and will

will seek opportunities for this end. You will be considering what greater things you may do for the glorious name of God than yet you have done. 4. You will reckon no piece of work or service too hard, and you will count it reward enough for any service, if God get glory by it. True it is, God allows you to aim at your own good and happiness, but in a due subordination to his glory. 5. You will be content with any lot and condition, so God be glorified by it. You will be content to be abased and obscured, so he be exalted. Christ's shining more brightly was matter of joy to John the Baptist, though he should be obscured thereby: *This my joy therefore is fulfilled*, says he—*He must increase, but I must decrease* (a). Life and death were all one to the apostle Paul, so Christ were magnified by either of them (b). You will study in this to imitate your blessed Lord and Saviour, who was content to suffer, so God might be glorified by his sufferings: *Father, glorify thy name* (c), says he, viz. by my sufferings. 6. You will be grieved for the dishonour done to God by yourselves or others. (1.) By yourselves. Your dishonouring God by sin will grieve you more than any trouble you bring on yourselves. (2.) By others. When the glory of God is trampled upon by wicked men, this will cut you to the heart. Some of you make an outcry against the sins of the time, and do not cry up a confederacy with profane and vicious men: but there may be too much of faction in this. If you stand rightly affected toward the glory of God, you will grieve and mourn in secret for the dishonour done to him by a profane generation, and the dishonour done to him will grieve you more than any injury done to yourselves. 7. You will be content that God be glorified by others as well as by yourselves. If God be honoured, you will rejoice, whoever be the instruments. We see this in the apostle Paul. Some *preached Christ out of envy* against the apostle: But, says he, *Christ is preached*, and God is like to have glory by it; therefore *I do and will rejoice* (d). It was matter of joy and rejoicing to him, that Christ's esteem was upon the growing hand, though it was by the means of such as bore him no good will.

Use 5. For comfort to believers in Christ, who have joined themselves to God in covenant through the blessed Mediator. And,

1. It is a ground of comfort that this glorious God is a God in

(a) John iii. 29. (b) Phil. i. 20, 21. (c) John xii. 28.
(d) Phil. i. 15, 16, 18.

n covenant with you. He is yours, who is infinite in glory and majesty; your Friend, your Father, your Husband, yea, your God. This may comfort you under all wants and losses. You have an infinitely excellent and glorious portion. God, as great and glorious as he is, is wholly yours. O, the riches of the poorest believer! He is yours, who is infinitely glorious in himself, and the fountain of all glory.

2. The consideration of the divine glory may comfort believers, against the sense of their unworthiness, in their addresses to God. You are sometimes under such a deep sense of your own vileness and unworthiness, that you cannot think to find favour in the eyes of the Lord. But, be not discouraged; for, though you find nothing in yourselves to be a ground of your confidence and hope, yet God finds enough in his own glorious name, as an argument for doing you good, when you come to him through Christ. His great aim, in all the dispensations of his grace, is *the praise of his glory (e)*. His design is to manifest and set forth his glory. Therefore he pitches upon such vile and unworthy creatures to be the objects of his grace, that he may be the more glorified. God would not have so much glory, if the poor creatures, to whom he shews favour, were not so vile and unworthy. And sometimes he brings sinners under a deep sense of their own vileness and unworthiness, that the glory of his grace may be the more manifest to them.

3. Here is ground of comfort against ignominy, reproach, and contempt, and any kind of sufferings, especially for the sake of God and Christ. You know not how soon you may be called to suffer for his name. In all appearance there are days of trial coming; and they may be near at hand. But the consideration of God's incomprehensible glory, affords ground of comfort to believers against the sharpest trials. For,

(1.) It is a great honour to suffer for him, considering what a glorious Majesty he is. Baseness for him is a preferment, and reproach for him is a great honour. It is said of Moses, that he *esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (f)*. And it is said of the apostles, when they had been scourged for preaching Christ, that they *rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name (g)*. It is an honour to be vile for God. Disgrace itself is honourable, when endured for the God and Lord of glory.

(2.) Much glory will redound to God by your patient suffering

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(e) Eph. i. 6, 12. (f) Heb. xi. 26. (g) Acts v. 41.

fering for him. By this the apostle comforts believers: *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye: On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified (h).* As the power of his grace will be manifested in supporting you under the sharpest trials you meet with; so your patient suffering for him will proclaim to the world that you serve a good Master. Now, it is a great encouragement to suffer, when by your suffering you will promote his glory. You should be content to part with all that is dear to you, yea, with your own lives, so God may be glorified.

(3.) Seeing he is a God of infinite glory, honest sufferers for him shall have a glorious reward. He hath provided *a crown of glory* for patient sufferers, yea, *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (i)*; such a crown as will abundantly recompence all your loss and pain in suffering for him. It is said of Stephen, the first New Testament martyr, that *he looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God (k)*. That, though extraordinary, was a pledge of what falleth out more ordinarily in the sufferings of believers. It is remarkable, that when Moses and Elias came to talk with Christ about his sufferings, they *appeared in glory (l)*. When you are clothed with shame and dishonour for Christ, think of the shining garments of glory; for these messengers of the cross were apparelled with a shining glory. For your shame, you shall have glory.

✓ 4. It is a comfort from this doctrine, that the Lord's being the God and Lord of glory gives believers ground to expect a glorious and happy state in the world to come. He is your God, and he is the King and Lord of glory, infinitely glorious in himself, and the Fountain of all glory; O then, what glory may you expect in the life to come? All that are his, are made like himself: They are *partakers of the divine nature (m)*: He puts a glory upon them, even in this world: They are *glorious within, and perfect through his comeliness which he puts upon them (n)*. But he will put a far greater glory upon them in the world to come. Then you shall find him a Lord of glory. Then you shall be like this glorious God after another manner than you are now. He will then put such a glory upon you as will be admired by all beholders, *when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe (o)*. Ye who are the children of this glorious God, shall, on that day, be clothed

(h) 1 Pet. iv. 14. (i) 2 Cor. iv. 17. (k) Acts vii. 55.
 (l) Luke ix. 31. (m) 2 Pet. i. 4. (n) Psal. xlv. 13, Ezek. xvi.
 14. (o) 2 Thess. i. 10.

ed with garments of glory; you shall be wholly glorious, in soul and body. *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.* Your bodies shall then be raised in glory (p). How beautiful and glorious shall they be, when they shall shine like the sun in its meridian lustre? And your souls shall be apparelled with glory; not the least scar or blot of sin shall be upon them, but the work begun in sanctification shall then be perfected in glorification.

Use 6. For exhortation; in several branches.

Exhort. 1. Let the consideration of God's glorious excellency engage you to make it your great business to get a saving interest in him. Get this excellent and glorious God for your God. To excite and quicken you to this, I shall propose a few considerations from the subject we are upon.

1. God, as great and glorious as he is, is willing to become your God, and that on gracious terms. He makes offer of himself to be yours; as it is typically expressed in these words of the prophet, *Thou shalt not be for another, so will I also be for thee.* And more plainly in that text, *Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me. There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. I am the Lord thy God: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it (q).* He invites you to come and accept of him for your God, and reasons and debates the matter with you. *Incline your ear, says he, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you (r).* And he takes it ill, when his kind and gracious offers are rejected, as is implied in that text, *My people would not hearken to my voice, &c. O that my people had hearkened unto me (s).* And why did he provide a Mediator, and give him to the death, but that he might become a God to a company of lost mankind, without any stain to his glory and honour.

2. Considering what a glorious Majesty he is, it is admirable condescension that he is willing to become a God to you. O how astonishing is it, that such vile wretches may be taken into a covenant relation to a God of infinite glory! He is not ashamed to be a God to you. So is his condescension in this matter expressed by the apostle: *God is not ashamed, says he, to be called their God (t).* He is infinite in glory and majesty; all the glory in the world is but vile in comparison; yet he is willing to bestow himself on sinful dust. O, how may this fill

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(p) Matth. xiii. 43. 1 Cor. xv. 43. (q) Hos. iii. 3. Psal. lxxxix. 8, 9, 10. (r) Isa. lv. 3. (s) Psal. lxxxix. 11, 18. (t) Heb. xi. 16.

Our hearts with astonishing wonder, that the infinitely glorious God is willing to become the property and possession of poor sinful worms! And shall not the consideration of his admirable condescension in this matter allure and gain our hearts to a ready compliance with his gracious offers?

3. Considering what a glorious Majesty he is, it will be both your honour and your happiness to have him for your God. He hath no equal in glory and excellency. Moses celebrates his matchless glory, in these words, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods! who is like thee! There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun.* And the psalmist cries out, *Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord (u).* All other enjoyments are nothing in comparison of him. The most excellent beings fall infinitely short of him. O then, how happy shall you be in having him for your God? His glory and excellency is infinitely beyond the understandings and apprehensions of men and angels. Can you hear so much of his matchless excellency and glory, and not breathe out such a wish, O that this excellent and glorious God were my God? Alas, many of you know him not, else you would be ready to trample upon all the crowns and kingdoms in the world for him. Many can hardly see any thing that is excellent and desirable without coveting it, which is both vain and sinful: But it is both lawful and necessary to wish, O that this excellent and glorious God were my God.

4. By chusing him for your God you will greatly glorify him. As it is highly dishonourable to him, and a great indignity done to his glorious Majesty, to reject him, and prefer other things before him; So it doth plainly shew what a high esteem you have of him, and what sense you have of his glory and excellency, when you prefer him before all others, and are content and desirous to have all your happiness in him alone.

5. Considering what a glorious Majesty he is, the advantage of chusing him for your God will be wholly your own. For, seeing he is an infinitely glorious Being, your chusing him for your God can add nothing to him, nor be of any advantage to him. Nothing can be added to his essential glory. True it is, his declarative glory is promoted thereby; but as it is his admirable condescension that he is pleased to manifest his glory; so also, that he is pleased to put such poor creatures in any capacity of being instrumental to manifest it: So that no advantage can redound to him. The happiness of chusing

(u) *Exod. xv. 11. Deut. xxxiii. 26. Psal. lxxxvi. 8.*

choosing him for your God, and the misery of rejecting him, will be wholly your own. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: But if thou scornewest, thou alone shalt bear it* (x). God hath no more need of us than of devils and damned reprobates; and would be no loser, though we all perished.

Well then, make it your business to get this infinitely glorious God for your God. For this end, study the knowledge of him. Labour for affecting apprehensions of his glory, majesty and excellency. Pray much for *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him* (y): and that God would discover to you the vanity and emptiness of other things that your hearts do so much doat upon: And pray for the attractive power of divine grace to draw in your hearts to God, and to incline you to a resolute and deliberate choice of him for your God. Put away all strange gods, your lusts and idols, without any secret reserve. Close with Christ by faith: For he cannot be your God but in Christ; out of Christ he is a consuming fire to sinners. And lastly, actually chuse him, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for your God, and resign yourselves to him, to be wholly and for ever his.

S E R M O N LX.

Exhort. 2. **I**S God infinite in glory and excellency? Let the consideration of this engage you to become his servants. I press this by these considerations from the doctrine.

1. Considering his greatness and glory, it is matter of wonder that he is not ashamed to have the like of you for servants. Indeed, he might justly be ashamed of this, considering what vile and unworthy creatures you are: But now, he is not ashamed to take you, vile and unworthy as you are, into his service. And it is not for any need he hath of you; for he is infinitely glorious, so that nothing can be added to him. If he had any need of service, he hath thousands of glorious creatures that never sinned to serve him: And if these were too few, he could create millions of millions of more creatures, with additional degrees of glory and excellency.

2. Consider, it is a great honour to serve him; for he is a glorious Master to serve. The servants of glorious persons, of kings and princes, are in great honour and respect: But, O, how much more honourable is it to serve him who is infinite
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(x) Prov. ix. 12. (y) Eph. i. 17.

in glory and majesty? Indeed, the meanest piece of service to him is honourable. This is the honourable mention that is made of Moses, when he was dead; *Moses, the servant of the Lord* (a). This was his high Elogy. All the saints have ever gloried in this, that they were the servants of God. How ambitious are men to serve such as shine in worldly glory? And shall not we be much more ambitious to serve him whose glory is above the earth and heaven?

3. Considering what a glorious Majesty he is, the privileges and advantages of being his servants must be very great. So it is with the servants of great and glorious persons. It is below their glory and dignity to deal meanly with their servants. They put upon them certain marks of distinction; they confer upon them glorious privileges, and great rewards, such as are suitable to their grandeur and glory. So doth the glorious God. His dealings with his servants are like himself. They have glorious privileges, and glorious rewards. As A-raunah gave like a king (b); so the God of glory gives, like himself, a glorious reward. O what may you not expect from a God of infinite glory and majesty, if you serve him diligently and faithfully? He will deal with you suitably and answerably to his glorious excellency.

Well then, become the Lord's servants. Renounce the service of sin and Satan; and resign yourselves unto God through Christ, to be wholly and for ever his. Come and take hold of God's covenant, and join yourselves to the Lord to serve him (c): And be content to serve him in any station, and to be employed in any piece of service, to which he may call you for his glory and honour.

Exhort. 3. Get a deep sense of the glory of God upon your heart. Labour to get your heart possessed with lively and powerful apprehensions of his glory. This will be of great advantage to you. For,

1. It will humble you under the possession of any glory and excellency you are capable of. We cannot glance upon his glory without humbling reflections upon our own meanness and nothingness. When Isaiah saw his glory, he sunk into nothing in his own thoughts, and cried out, *Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips* (d). One glimpse of the glory of Christ in a miracle, made Peter cry out, *Lord depart from me, for I am a sinful man* (e). The angels, who be-

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(a) Deut. xxxiv. 5. (b) 2 Sam. xxiv. 23. (c) Isa. lvi. 3, 4.
(d) Isa. vi. 5. (e) Luke v. 8.

hold his glory, *cover their faces*, as being sensible of their weakness to bear the lustre of his Majesty ; and they *cover their feet*, as being ashamed of their vileness before him (f). How much more may the splendor of his glory humble us, who are vile sinful dust, and dwell in houses of clay ? The apprehension of his glory made the elders humble themselves in the midst of all their glory ; so that they *fell down before him, and cast their crowns before the throne* (g). O what a self-annihilation will there be, when you have lively apprehensions of the divine glory !

2. It will fill you with reverence, especially in your approaches unto God. His glory renders him venerable, and fit to be revered by poor creatures. When you have the glory of God in your view, and a deep sense of it upon your heart, how awful will you be in your approaches to him ! And how much will you be afraid of casting any thing before him that may offend the eyes of his glory ? Who would venture rashly into the presence of a glorious king upon his throne ? So, when you behold God in his glory and majesty, and are possessed with lively apprehensions of it : this will promote reverence, and an awful regard, and a holy ardor of spirit in his service. Therefore God proposeth his glorious greatness to our consideration, when we draw near to him in worship. *Cursed be the deceiver*, says he, *who hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing : For I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen* (h).

3. It will produce a holy fear of God, and arm you against sin and temptations. If the thoughts of the divine glory were impressed upon you, you would look on sin with a deep detestation and abhorrence. Mens' taking liberty to sin ariseth from their mean thoughts of God, as if he were not worthy to be regarded. But lively apprehensions of his infinite glory and majesty, would give check to sin in your thoughts, and make you tremble upon the approach of a temptation. You would be ready to say, O he is a glorious Majesty with whom I have to do ; how can I do this wickedness and sin against him ? When Satan assaults, think of the glory of God, and revive the sense of it upon your heart ; this will blunt the edge of the temptation.

4. It will heighten your contempt of the world, and of all worldly glory. When God is seen in his glory, all things will be

(f) Isa. vi. 2, 3. (g) Rev. iv. 10. (h) Mal. i. 14.

be vile and base in your eyes in comparison of him. As the stars, which appear beautiful in the night, evanish and disappear in our eyes when the sun ariseth: So a sight of the glory of God would dim all the glory of the world, and make all the fancied glory and excellency of other things to evanish in our apprehension.

4. It will fill you with a holy admiration of his grace and condescension in taking notice of such vile sinful worms as you are. When the psalmist had the glory of God under his view, how did he admire his condescension! Therefore he cries out, *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained: what is man that thou art mindful of him (i)?* When you have lively apprehensions of God's matchless excellency and glory, his love and grace, goodness and mercy to sinful dust, will be admirable and astonishing in your eyes. Solomon cries out, *But will God in very deed, dwell with men on the earth (k)?* The infinitely glorious God, who is clothed with glory and majesty, that he should dwell with sinful men, O how astonishing is this! A deep sense of the glory of God upon your heart, will raise your admiration of his goodness and condescension, even in the mercies of his common providence: How much more will it fill you with an admiration of his love and grace in Christ! That he should give his only begotten and well-beloved Son to and for such vile wretches as we are; and that such rebels should be received into favour, and share of such glorious blessings, and be brought into so nigh a relation to such a glorious Majesty!

Well then, make it your business to get lively and powerful apprehensions of the glory of God, to have a deep sense of it upon your heart. For this end I do seriously recommend these things to you.

1. Be often contemplating his glory in these manifestations he hath been pleased to give of it. Contemplate his glory in his blessed word, and in his works both of creation and providence. But especially contemplate his glory in Christ. In our redemption by Christ we have a more signal manifestation of the glory of God than in all the works that he hath made, as, the Lord willing, I may have occasion to shew you afterward. As we cannot look upon the sun in its brightness, without dazzling our eyes; but when we look upon it through painted

(i) Psal. viii. 1, 3, 4. (k) 2 Chron. vi. 16.

painted glass, then the lustre of it is moderated: So, we cannot behold the glory of God immediately and in itself, without being overwhelmed by it; but in Christ it is tempered to our view, so that we may have a delightful sight of the divine glory in his blessed face (*l*). Often contemplate the glory of God's infinite wisdom and grace, of his infinite justice and holiness, and of his infinite truth and faithfulness, as the same shines forth to us in the person of Christ God-Man.

2. I recommend deep meditation. Much of the life of religion lies here. By meditation, we enter, as it were, within the vail, that we may see the glory of God. When Moses was in the Mount with God, he had such discoveries of his glory as made his face to shine. Be much in the Mount with God by holy meditation; this is the way to get saving manifestations of his glory.

3. Give yourselves much to prayer. Pray much for *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God* (*m*). Pray for open eyes to see his glory, and that he would draw by the vail, and reveal and manifest his glory to you; And never give over till *God shine in your heart*, by the lively light of his Spirit, *to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (*n*). You cannot see his glory but by the light of his own Spirit. *In thy light*, says the Psalmist, *we shall see light* (*o*).

4. Entertain and cherish the enlightening motions of the Spirit of God. When any divine light springs into your heart, entertain it kindly, and bless God for it. Every such motion is a beam from heaven: Therefore do not shut your eyes against it; else it will be snatched away from you by some intervening cloud, and you may never have the like again.

5. Be diligent in the use of the ordinances. These are the glasses in which the glory of God is to be seen, as I may have occasion to shew you afterward. Indeed there is a delightful view of the glory of God to be had especially in the public ordinances. This makes the saints long so much after them, that they may *see his power and glory in the sanctuary*; and that they may *dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold his beauty* (*p*). Therefore be diligent in the use of the public ordinances: And use them with due preparation: And pursue the great end and design of them, viz. a sight of the glory and beauty of

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God

(*l*) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (*m*) Eph. i. 17. (*n*) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (*o*) Psal. xxxvi. 9. (*p*) Psal. lxxiii. 2. and xxvii. 4.

God in the face of Christ. Let nothing less than this yield you satisfaction.

Exhort. 4. Admire the glory of God. Persons and things use to be admired proportionably to their glory and excellency. O, how much is he to be admired whose glory is infinite and incomprehensible? The psalmist breaks out into a holy admiration, *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens (q).* How was his heart ravished with the thoughts of the divine glory and excellency! It will be admired by angels and saints for evermore: And shall not we admire it? His glory is incomprehensible: Let us admire what we cannot comprehend. Contemplate his glory, and praise it with admiration. Not to admire it, is to derogate from it, and to depress his Majesty.

Exhort. 5. Reverence, fear, and adore this glorious God. Reverence and adoration is properly due to glory and majesty: And incomparable glory and greatness calls for incomparable reverence. Hence the prophet cries out, *Thou art great, and thy name is great in might: who would not fear thee, O King of nations (r)?* We read, that when the prophet saw the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, he fell upon his face (s); which is the proper gesture of reverence and adoration. O what holy awe should the consideration of God's glorious Majesty impress upon our hearts! We should neither speak nor think of him without a deep reverence.

Exhort. 6. Seek true glory from God alone. Says our Lord to the Jews, *How can you believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only (t).* Seek that honour and glory that cometh from God only; that glory which is warranted and approved by him, and which he gives especially to his own. He is the fountain of all glory. Internal spiritual glory is from him: He is *the God of all grace (u).* And whatever is excellent and glorious, gifts and endowments of body and mind, honour and reputation from men, outward splendor, glory, and dignity; whatever hath any glory in it, all is from him; he is the fountain. Therefore seek true glory from him alone. And seek and wait for it in his own way, in the way of duty. For this end I recommend these things.

1. Contemn all worldly glory. It is said of Moses, *He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (x).* Set not your heart

(q) Psal. viii. 1. (r) Jer. x. 6, 7. (s) Ezek. i. 29. (t) John v. 44. (u) 1 Pet. v. 18. (x) Heb. ix. 24.

heart upon external glory. Count it an abasement in comparison of that glory which is spiritual. Do not hunt after it. The glory of the world is but a shew and shadow of true glory. It is transitory and vanishing. *All the glory of man is as the flower of the grass (y).* And many times the more of worldly glory, the less true spiritual glory; for God useth not to flow in both ways.

2. Study humility. This is the way to true glory. *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* Yea, humility hath a glory in itself. It is an ornament: Rich mens' humility is their glory: Let the rich rejoice, says the apostle, *in that he is made low (z).* Your glory lies not in the outward pomp and splendor of your condition, but in the humility of your hearts.

3. Whatever glory you have, whether outward respect from men, or civil authority and place, or excellent gifts and parts, or riches and wealth, or true grace; whatever glory you are possessed of, lay out and improve all for the glory and honour of God. *Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine (a).* This holds also in other things. To improve any excellency you have for the glory of God, is the sure way to true glory: For *them that honour me, says the Lord, I will honour (b).* The elders cast their crowns before the throne (c); thereby professing it was their great design to improve all that honour and dignity to which they were advanced, for the glory and honour of him that sat upon the throne.

4. Continue and persevere in the good ways of the Lord, † notwithstanding of what trials and afflictions you may be trysted with. *Seek for glory and honour, by patient continuance in well-doing (d).* Be not ashamed of your holy profession, when it comes to be discountenanced and persecuted; but hold fast your profession, and cleave to the truth, and keep God's way even under the sharpest trials. This is the way to true glory. *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you (e).* It is a glory to suffer for Christ: And it is honourable and glorious to be stedfast in his cause in the worst of times. To approve yourselves

(y) 1 Pet. i. 24. (z) Matth. xxiii. 12. 1 Pet. iii. 5. James i. 10.

(a) Prov. iii. 9. (b) 1 Sam. ii. 30. (c) Rev. iv. 10.

† *Nec prece, nec pretio, nec gratia, nec periculo, nec similitate, a Via recta deducti oportet.* Cic. Rhet. L. 3.

(d) Rom. ii. 7.

(e) 1 Pet. iv. 14.

selves valiant champions for Christ, and to stand your ground against all assaults, O how glorious is this! And this is the way to endless glory: *Be thou faithful unto death,* says Christ, *and I will give thee a crown of life (f).*

Well then, whatever hath any true glory in it, seek that from God; and seek it in his own way. Follow his counsel, and lean not to your own understanding. God can advance you, and make you honourable in the eyes of men. As you are glorious in his eyes, if devoted to him through Christ; so he can make his respect to you conspicuous to the world. And if he see it fit and meet to deny you outward worldly glory, he will make it up another way, in true spiritual glory, in ornaments of grace, and glorious privileges, that are more valuable than all the splendor and glory of the world.

Exhort. 7. Is it so, that God is infinite and incomprehensible in his glory? O then, give glory to him. The psalmist exhorts to this: *Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people; give unto the Lord, glory and strength: Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name (g).* And this is the practice of the saints; How often doth the apostle use that doxology, *To him be glory for ever. Amen (h).*

But how are we to give glory to God? Not by adding any glory to him, seeing he is infinitely glorious, so that he is not capable of any additional glory; but we are to give glory to him,

1. By ascribing to him the glory of his infinite power, wisdom, justice, goodness, &c. manifested in his works. To this the psalmist exhorts us: *Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty; give unto the Lord, glory and strength: Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name (i).* As there ought to be a hearty acknowledgment of his manifested glory, so also a publication and declaration thereof to others. *Declare his glory among the heathen (k).* We are to blazon the name of God, and make his praise glorious. Hence the apostle Jude concludes with that doxology, *To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (l).* And we meet frequently with such doxologies in the apostolical epistles.

2. By ascribing to him the glory of every excellent work, of whatsoever is praise-worthy. So do the saints: *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory. Thine, O Lord, is the victory (m).* In every song of thanksgiving we give God the

(f) Rev. ii. 10. (g) Psal. xcvi. 7, 8. (h) Rom. xi. 36. and elsewhere. (i) Psal. xxix. 1, 2. (k) Psal. xcvi. 3. (l) Jude 25. (m) Psal. cxv. 1. 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

the glory. The glory of every excellent work is due to him alone, and ought not to be given to any other. Hence the church gives God the glory of the victories obtained over the Canaanites: *They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: But thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them* (n). God is very jealous of his glory, and will not suffer the least part of it to be given to any other. Men must be honoured as instruments; but we must reserve to God all his glory. The sweetness of the stream must not make us forget the fountain. When we exalt instruments, and give the praise and glory to them; it is as if we would thank the tools for building the house, and ascribe nothing to the workmen.

3. By ascribing to him the glory of any excellency we have; owning and acknowledging him for all the glory we are possessed of, and giving him the praise of it. *By the grace of God I am that I am*, says the apostle: And, says David, *Both riches and honour come of thee* (o). Whatever glory you have, whether glory of dignity, or glory of wealth, or glory of strength, or glory of gifts and parts; ascribe all to him as the Fountain. Give him the glory of all the grace you have, and of all the privileges you are invested with. *The elders cast their crowns before the throne* (p); thereby acknowledging that they had their crowns and dignity from him, and did hold all of him.

4. By ascribing to him the glory of all the good we do. The most eminent saints, in their highest performances, have been much afraid lest any of the glory of God should cleave to their fingers †; as the apostle: *I laboured more abundantly than they all*, says he, *yet not I, but the grace of God who was with me* (q). And when Peter had wrought that great miracle of curing the poor cripple (r), he feared lest the people should attribute too much to him, and therefore was concerned to give Christ all the glory. See that you be not puffed up, when you have done any thing for God, as if you had done it by your own power and strength. This were to rob God of his glory, which is the greatest sacrilege in the world. In the parable, the industrious servant said, *Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds* (s): Not, *my industry*, but *thy pound*.

It

(n) Psal. xlv. 3. (o) 1 Cor. xv. 10. 1 Chron. xxix. 10. (p) Rev. iv. 10.

† *Quicquid boni egeris in Deos refer.* Bias in Laert.

(q) 1 Cor. xv. 10. See 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7. (r) Acts iii. 12, 13, (s) Luke xix. 16.

It is true, we cannot give God all the glory that is due unto his name: Yet we should give him all the glory that our united and most enlarged faculties possibly can give him. Own and acknowledge that he is worthy of all glory, as the elders do: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power (t).* Though you cannot give him glory and honour as it becomes; yet own that he is worthy to have all glory given to him; that it is his due; that it is meet and becoming that he should have it, though it be a work beyond you. *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (u).*

Exhort. 8. Make the glory of God your chief end.

Exhort. 9. Make it the great employment and business of your lives to glorify God.

But I shall speak to both these from distinct texts of scripture.

(t) Rev. iv. 11. (u) Rev. v. 12.

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CON.

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